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W O R K S

OF THE

REV. CHARLES BRIDGES, M.A.

VICAR OF OLD NEWTON, SUFFOLK.

VOL. III.

EXPOSITION OF PSALM CXIX.,

AND

MEMOIR OF MARY JANE GRAHAM.

NEW YORK:

ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,
No. 285 BROADWAY.

1849.

EXPOSITION OF PSALM CXIX:

AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE

CHARACTER AND EXERCISES

OF

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

BY THE

REV. CHARLES BRIDGES, M.A.

VICAR OF OLD NEWTON, SUFFOLK.

AUTHOR OF "EXPOSITION OF PROVERBS," "CHRISTIAN MINISTRY," "MEMOIR OF
MARY JANE GRAHAM," ETC.

FROM THE SEVENTEENTH LONDON EDITION.

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P R E F A C E.

A CONSIDERABLE portion of the Sacred Volume (as the Books of Psalms and Canticles in the Old Testament, and a large part of the several Epistles in the New Testament) is occupied with the interesting subject of Christian Experience; and exhibits its character, under different dispensations of religion, and diversified with an endless variety of circumstances, as ever essentially the same. As the same features of countenance and elevation of stature have always marked the human species in the midst of the creation of God; so an identity of feature and "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" has, in all ages, and under every shade of outward difference, distinguished the family of God as "the people that should dwell alone, and should not be reckoned among the nations."¹ This indeed was to have been expected. Human nature has undergone no change since the fall. In its unrenewed state it is still captivated in the same chains of sin; and, when renewed, it is under the influence of the same Spirit of grace. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."² We might therefore have conceived, that the modern believer, when employed in tracing the records of Patriarchal or Mosaical experience, will mark in the infirmities of the ancient people of God a picture of his own heart, "answering, as in water face answereth to face;"³ and in comparing their external exercises with his own, will be ready to acknowledge, "All these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."⁴

In this view, it is the object of this work to exhibit an Old Testament believer in a New Testament garb, as one "walking in the same spirit, and in the same steps" with ourselves; and, in bringing his features of character to the Evangelical standard, it is presumed, that the correspondence will be found to be complete. "Faith which worketh by love"⁵—the fundamental distinction of the Gospel—pervades the whole man; with at least an *implied* reference to the one way of access to God,⁶ and a distinct regard alike to the promises,⁷ and to the precepts,⁸ of Divine revelation. Nor are the workings of this principle delineated with less accuracy. In all the variety of Christian feelings and holy conduct, we observe its operations leading the soul into communion with God, and moulding every part into a progressive conformity to his image. When we view the "man after God's own heart"—taking God for his portion⁹

¹ Numbers xxiii. 9.

² John iii. 6.

³ Prov. xxvii. 19.

⁴ 1 Cor. xii. 11.

⁵ Gal. v. 6.

⁶ Verses 41, 83, 132, 135.

⁷ Verses 25, 32, 49, 74, 169, 170.

⁸ Verses 66, 166.

⁹ Verse 57.

—associating with his people,¹ and feeding upon his word;² when we mark his zeal for his Master's glory:³ his devotedness⁴ and self-denial⁵ in his Master's work—when we see him ever ready to confess his name,⁶ to bear his reproach,⁷ and caring only to answer it by a more steady adherence to his service⁸—do we not in those lineaments of character recognize the picture of one, who in after times could turn to the churches of Christ, and say, “Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me?”⁹ Or can we recollect the Psalmist's insight into the extent and spirituality of the law of God,¹⁰ and his continual conflict with indwelling sin¹¹—awakening in him the spirit of wrestling prayer,¹² and confidence in the God of his salvation¹³—and not be again forcibly reminded of him, who has left upon record the corresponding history of his own experience—“We know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin: I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!”¹⁴ In short, let his instancy in prayer¹⁵ and praise¹⁶ be remembered—his determined¹⁷ and persevering¹⁸ cultivation of heart-religion¹⁹ and practical holiness,²⁰ his hungering and thirsting after righteousness;²¹ his jealous fear²² and watchful tenderness²³ against sin, and regard for the honor of his God;²⁴ his yearning compassion over his fellow-sinners;²⁵ his spiritual taste;²⁶ his accurate discernment;²⁷ the “simplicity” of his dependence,²⁸ and the godly “sincerity” of his obedience,²⁹ his peace of mind and stability of profession;³⁰ his sanctified improvement of the cross;³¹ his victory over the world;³² his acknowledgment of the Lord's mercy;³³ his trials of faith and patience;³⁴ his heavenly liberty in the ways of God,³⁵ his habitual living in his presence,³⁶ and under the quickening,³⁷ restraining,³⁸ directing,³⁹ and supporting⁴⁰ influence of his word—let these holy exercises be considered—either separately, or as forming one admirable concentration of Christian excellence—and what do we desire more to complete the portrait of a finished servant of God upon the Divine model? Is not this a visible demonstration of the power of the word, in “perfecting the man of God and furnishing him thoroughly unto all good works?”⁴¹

Having explained the Evangelical character of this Psalm, we may notice its peculiar adaptation to Christian experience. It may be considered as the journal of one, who was deeply taught in the things of God—long practised in the life and walk of faith. It contains the anatomy of experimental religion—the interior lineaments of the family of God. It is given for the use of believers in all ages, as an excellent

¹ Verses 63, 79.

³ Verse 139.

⁶ Verses 45, 46, 115, 172.

⁸ Verses 51, 78, 157.

¹¹ Verses 113, 163.

¹⁴ Rom. vii. 9, 14, 24, 25.

¹⁷ Verses 5, 36, 80.

²⁰ Verses 106, 167, 168.

²² Verse 161.

²⁵ Verses 53, 136, 158.

²⁷ Verses 98—100, 104, 129, 130.

²⁹ Verses 104, 128.

³² Verses 14, 36, 72, 127, 162.

³⁴ Verses 81—83, 107, 123.

³⁷ Verses 50, 93.

⁴⁰ Verses 92, 143.

⁴ Verse 38.

⁹ 1 Cor. iv. 16.

¹² Verses 25, 28.

¹⁵ Verses 145—149.

¹⁸ Verses 44, 102, 112.

²³ Verses 11, 37, 133.

³⁰ Verse 165.

³⁵ Verses 32, 45.

³⁸ Verse 101.

⁴¹ 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

² Verses 47, 48, 97, 111.

⁵ Verse 62.

⁷ Verses 23, 69, 87, 141.

¹⁰ Verse 96.

¹³ Verses 114, 176.

¹⁶ Verse 164.

¹⁹ Verses 30—32, 59, 60.

²¹ Verses 20, 40, 131, 174.

²⁴ Verse 39.

²⁶ Verses 103, 140.

²⁸ Verses 8, 10, 86, 116, 117.

³¹ Verses 67, 71, 75.

³³ Verses 64, 65, 68.

³⁶ Verse 168.

³⁹ Verses 9, 24, 30, 105.

touchstone of vital godliness—a touchstone which appears especially needful in this day of profession; not—as warranting our confidence in the Saviour, or as constituting in any measure our ground of acceptance with God: but as exciting us to “give diligence to make our calling and election sure,”¹ and quicken our sluggish steps in the path of self-denying obedience. The Writer is free to confess, that his main design in the study of this Psalm was to furnish a correct standard of Evangelical sincerity for the habitual scrutiny of his own heart; and if, in the course of this Exposition, any suggestion should be thrown out, to call the attention of his fellow-christians to this most important, but alas! too much neglected, duty, he will have reason to “rejoice in the day of Christ, that he has not run in vain, neither labored in vain.”² Never let it be supposed, that a diligent, prayerful, probing examination of the “chambers of imagery,” “gendereth unto bondage.”³ Invariably will it be found to establish the enjoyment of Scriptural assurance. “*Hereby*, we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.”⁴ As therefore the preceptive part of the gospel thus becomes our guide in the happy path of filial obedience, our beloved rule of duty, and the standard of our daily progress: we shall learn in the use of it to depend more entirely upon the Saviour; fresh energy will be put into our prayers; and the promises of pardon and grace will be doubly precious to our souls.

These views of the Divine life cannot be found unfriendly to the best happiness of mankind. The Psalm opens with a most inviting picture of blessedness, and describes throughout the feelings of one, encompassed indeed with trials superadded to the common lot of men, but yet evidently in possession of a satisfying portion—of a “joy, with which a stranger does not intermeddle.”⁵ Of those, therefore, who would affix the stigma of melancholy to evangelical religion, we are constrained to remark, that they “understand neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.”⁶ The children of Edom have never tasted the “clusters of Canaan,” and cannot therefore form any just estimate of that goodly land. They that have spied the land can bring a good report of it, and tell them, “Surely it floweth with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it.”⁷ “The work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.”⁸

The structure of this Psalm is peculiar—divided into twenty-two parts—agreeing with the number of the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet—each part, and its several verses, beginning with the corresponding letter

¹ 2 Peter i. 10.

² ‘I know of no other part of the Holy Scriptures’ (remarks a profound divine) ‘where the nature and evidences of true and sincere godliness are so fully and largely insisted on and delineated as in the 119th Psalm. The Psalmist declares his design in the first verses of the Psalm, keeps his eye on it all along, and pursues it to the end. The excellence of holiness is represented as the immediate object of a spiritual taste and delight. God’s law—that grand expression and emanation of the holiness of God’s nature, and prescription of holiness to the creature—is all along represented as the great object of the love, the complacence, and the rejoicing of the gracious nature, which prizes God’s commandments “above gold, yea, the finest gold;” and to which they are “sweeter than the honey and the honey-comb.”—*Edwards on Religious Affections*, part iii. sect. iii. ‘The ordinary and serious breathing of my soul’ (observes a deeply spiritual thinker,) ‘is such as that of the Psalmist throughout the 119th Psalm.’—*Halyburton’s Life*.

³ John iii. 9, with 18, 20, 21.

⁴ Proverbs xiv. 10.

⁵ 1 Timothy i. 7.

⁶ Numbers xiii. 27.

⁷ Isaiah xxii. 17.

of the Alphabet.¹ The whole Psalm is in the form of an ejaculatory address, with the exception of the first three verses, which may almost be considered as the preface to the whole, and one other verse in the course of it, where the man of God rebukes the ungodly from his presence, as if intruding into his "hiding-place," and interrupting his communion with his God.² It is not always easy to trace the connection between the several verses; at least not beyond the several divisions of the Psalm. Probably nothing more was intended, than the record of the exercises of his own heart at different periods, and under different circumstances. If, however, they are not links on the same chain, in continuous and unbroken dependence—they may at least be considered as pearls upon one string, of equal though independent value. The prominent characteristic of the Psalm is a love for the word of God, which is brought before us under no less than ten different names,³ referring to some latent and distinguishing properties of the divine word, whose manifold excellencies and perfections are thus illustrated with much elegant variety of diction.⁴ In many instances, however, the several terms appear to have been varied, to adapt themselves to the metre; while, perhaps, at other times they may be promiscuously used for the whole revelation of God;⁵ that the view of its inexhaustible fulness might thus conciliate a more attentive regard to its authority; and might add fresh strength to the obligation to read, believe, love, and live in it.

If the Writer may be permitted to suggest the method in which this Exposition may be best studied to advantage, he would beg to refer to the advice of the excellent Philip Henry to his children—that they should 'take a verse of Psalm cxix. every morning to meditate upon, and so go over the Psalm twice in a year: 'and *that*'—said he—'will bring you to be in love with all the rest of the Scripture.'⁶ The writer does not presume to suppose, that this superficial sketch will supply food for meditation year after year. Yet he ventures to hope, that it may have its use, in directing the attention from time to time to a most precious portion of Holy Writ; which, however unfruitful it may have proved to the undiscerning mind, will be found by the serious and intel-

¹ *Intelligimus ideo per literas Hebræorum, Psalmum hunc esse digestum, ut homo noster, tanquam parvulus, et ab infantia per literarum elementa formatus, quitus ætas puerilis assuevit, usque ad maturitatem virtutis exerceat.*—*Ambrose.*

² Verse 115, with 113, 114.

³ Such as way, law, judgments, words, statutes, commandments, precepts, testimonies, righteousness, truth.

⁴ Rev. T. H. Horne's Introduction to Scripture, vol. ii. 536.

⁵ As a proof of the promiscuous and extended application of those terms, whose definite sense is restricted to particular parts of revelation—we may mark the use of the word "law" applied by our Saviour to quotations from the book of Psalms. Compare John xv. 25, with Psalm xxxv. 16: lxix. 4; also John x. 34, with Psalm lxxxii. 6. 'Under this word—"law"—Calvin observes—"there is no doubt, but that David comprehended the sum of all the doctrine, which God gave to his church." Sermons on Psalm cxix. verse 153. Compare Psalm xix. 7, margin.

⁶ P. Henry's Life, William's Edition, p. 247. In conformity with this rule, we find his godly daughter writing thus in her diary:—1687, 8. March 9, Friday morning. I have been of late taking some pains to learn by heart Psalm cxix. and have made some progress therein.' Extracted from Mrs. Savage's MSS. in P. Henry's Life—Ditto. As an illustration of the view given by this excellent man of the importance of this Psalm, an Index is added to this work of the several matters more or less touched upon; to which, as well as to the texts referred to throughout the work, the reader's attention is invited.

ligent reader to be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction, in righteousness."¹

The composition of this work has been diversified, with as much variety as the nature of the subject would allow. The descriptive character of the book will be found to be interspersed with matter of discussion, personal address, hints for self-inquiry, and occasional supplication, with the earnest endeavor to cast the mind into a meditative, self-scrutinizing, devotional frame, in which the new creature is strengthened, and increases, and goes on to perfection. Such, however, as the work is, the Writer would commend it to the gracious consideration of the great Head of the Church: imploring pardon for what in it may be his own, and a blessing on what may be traced to a purer source:—and in giving both the pardon and the blessing, may his holy name be abundantly glorified.²

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 16. Luther professed that he prized this Psalm so highly, that he would not take the whole world in exchange for one leaf of it. Bishop Cowper sweetly calls it—'a Holy Alphabet—so plain that children may understand it—so rich and instructive that the wisest and most experienced may every day learn something from it.' Added to this and other testimonies before given, we give the remarks of a deeply experimental and solid divine:—'I am now,' writes the Rev. H. Venn to one of his correspondents—'upon the point of expounding the 119th Psalm, which I never did go through; yet I know not any part of Scripture much more profitable. In that Psalm, the whole inner man is delineated, and the several changing frames of our poor hearts, and the several blessed motions and inspirations of the Holy Spirit are touched in a very affecting manner. This is the Psalm I have often had recourse to, when I could find no spirit of prayer in my own heart, and at length the fire was kindled, and I could pray. What has been your experience regarding this extraordinary Psalm? I know you do not read the Scriptures idly, and without self-application. Have you not found it pleasant and nourishing to your soul, and fastening upon your mind.'—(Life and Correspondence, p. 410.) Identical with this representation was the use and blessing which H. Martyn found in this Psalm,—'found some devotion in learning some of 119th Psalm.—In the evening grew better by reading Psalm 119, which generally brings me into a spiritual frame of mind. My mind was beginning to sink into discontent at my unprofitableness; but by reading some of Psalm 119, and prayer, I recovered.' Again in a fretful frame—'It was not till I learnt some of Psalm 119 that I could return to a proper spirit. Again—'the 119th Psalm was very solemnizing.'—See his interesting Journals, just published, vol. i. pp. 75, 114, 118, 175, 193, 194.

² Domine Deus, quæcunque dixi de tuo, agnoscant et tui. Siqua de meo, et tu ignosce et tui.—August. Lib. 15, de Trin.

OLD NEWTON VICARAGE,
July 20th, 1827.

PREFACE TO THE SIXTEENTH EDITION.

THE Writer gratefully acknowledges the kind indulgence, with which his work has been received by the Church of Christ. Oh! may his God and Saviour have all the glory, while he is humbled in thankfulness for the high privilege of leading his fellow-sinners into the "ways of pleasantness and peace," and of ministering to the spiritual edification of the family of God!

He has once more carefully revised the work, and trusts that he has been enabled to give increased perspicuity to the style, and a deeper moulding of evangelical statement to the matter. He has desired, that every page should be lighted up with the beam of the "Sun of Righteousness," who is the glory of the Revelation of God—the Christian's "All in all." He has endeavored to illustrate true religion, as the work of the Divine Spirit, grounded on the knowledge of Christ, advancing in communion with Him, and completed in the enjoyment of Him, and of the Father by him. He has also aimed to elevate the standard of Christian privilege, as flowing immediately from Him: by giving such a Scriptural statement of the doctrine of assurance, as may quicken the slothful to greater diligence in their holy profession, and at the same time encourage the weak and fearful to a clearer apprehension of their present salvation.

The work has been recently translated into German under the kind patronage of her Majesty the Queen Dowager. The Writer requests the prayers of his Readers, that this new channel of usefulness may be abundantly blessed for the grand object of extending the influence of vital religion throughout the churches.

OLD NEWTON VICARAGE,
October 12, 1842.

AN EXPOSITION OF PSALM CXIX.

PART I.

1. *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.*

THIS most interesting and instructive Psalm, like the Psalter itself, 'opens with a beatitude for our comfort and encouragement, directing us immediately to that happiness, which all mankind in different ways are seeking and inquiring after. All would secure themselves from the incursions of misery; but all do not consider that misery is the offspring of sin, from which therefore it is necessary to be delivered and preserved, in order to become happy or "blessed."¹

The *undefiled* character described in this verse marks, in an evangelical sense, "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile"²—not one who is without sin, but one who in the sincerity of his heart can say—"that which I do I allow not."³ As his *way* is, so is his "walk"—"*in the law of the Lord.*" He is "strengthened in the Lord, and he walks up and down in his name"⁴—his "ears hearing a word behind him, saying—this is the way, walk ye in it—when he is turning to the right hand or to the left."⁵ And if the pardon of sin, imputation of righteousness,⁶ the communion of saints, and a sense of acceptance with God;⁷—if protection in providence and grace,⁸ and, finally and for ever, the beatific vision,⁹ are the sealed privileges of his upright people, then there can be no doubt, that "*blessed are the undefiled in the way.*" And if temporal prosperity,¹⁰ spiritual renovation and fruitfulness,¹¹ increasing illumination,¹² intercourse with the Saviour,¹³ peace within,¹⁴ and, throughout eternity, a right to the tree of life,¹⁵ are privileges of incalculable value; then surely "*the walk in the law of the Lord*" is "the path of pleasantness and peace." "Truly"—indeed may

¹ Bp. Horne on Psalm i. 1.

³ Rom. vii. 15.

⁶ Ps. xxxii. 1, 2, with Rom. iv. 6—8.

⁹ Matt. v. 8.

¹¹ Ps. i. 2, 3.

¹⁴ Ver. 163.

Gal. vi. 16.

Isa. xxxii. 17.

² John i. 47. Comp. Acts xxiv. 16.

⁴ Zech. x. 12.

⁷ 1 John i. 7.

¹⁰ Joshua i. 7, 8.

¹² John vii. 17.

Comp. Acts xxiv. 16.

⁵ Isa. xxx. 21.

⁸ 2 Chron. xvi. 9. Job i. 8, 10.

¹³ 1b. xiv. 23; xv. 14, 15.

¹⁵ Rev. xxii. 14.

we say—"God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart."¹

But let each of us ask—What is the "*way*" of my heart with God? Is it always an "*undefiled way*?" Is "iniquity" never "regarded in the heart?" Is all that God hates habitually lamented, abhorred, forsaken? "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."²

Again—What is my "*walk*?" Is it from the living principle of union with Christ? This is the direct—the only source of spiritual life. We are first quickened in him. Then we walk in him and after him. Oh! that this my walk may be steady, consistent, advancing! Oh! that I may be ever listening to my Father's voice—"I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect!"³

Is there not enough of defilement in the most "*undefiled way*," and enough of inconsistency in the most consistent "*walk*" to endear to us the gracious declaration of the gospel—"If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous?"⁴

2. *Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.*

THE "testimony" in the singular number, usually denotes the whole canon of the inspired writings—the revelation of the will of God to mankind—the standard of their faith.⁵ "*Testimonies*" appear chiefly, to mark the preceptive part of Scripture⁶—that part, in which this man of God always found his spiritual delight and perfect freedom. Mark his language: "*I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.*"⁷ Not however that this blessedness belongs to the mere outward act of obedience;⁸ but rather to that practical habit of mind, which seeks to know the will of God in order to "*keep*" it. This habit is under the influence of the promise of God—"I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them."⁹ And in thus "*keeping the testimonies of God*," the believer maintains the character of one that "*seeks him with the whole heart.*"

Oh! how many seek, and seek in vain, for no other reason, than because they do not "*seek him with the whole heart!*" The worldling's "heart is divided; now shall he be found faulty."¹⁰ The professor "with his mouth shows much love; but his heart goeth after his covetousness."¹¹ The backslider "*hath not turned unto me with his whole heart*, but feignedly, saith the Lord."¹²

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 1.

⁴ 1 John ii. 1.

⁷ Verses 14, 111.

⁹ Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

¹² Jer. iii. 10.

² Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.

⁵ Comp. Isa. viii. 20.

⁸ Treasure up his testimonies—Bp. Horsley.

¹⁰ Hos. x. 2.

³ Gen. xvii. 1.

⁶ Verse 138.

¹¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

The faithful, upright believer alone brings his heart, *his whole heart*, to the Lord—"When thou saidst—Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee—Thy face, Lord, will I seek."¹ For he only has found an object that attracts and fills his whole heart—and if he had a thousand hearts, would attract and fill them all. He has found his way to God by faith in Jesus. In that way he continues to *seek*. His whole heart is engaged to know and love more and more. Here alone the blessing is enjoyed, and the promise made good—"Ye shall seek me, and find me, when *ye shall search for me with all your heart*."²

But let me not shrink from the question—Do I "*keep his testimonies*" from constraint or from love? Surely when I consider my own natural aversion and enmity to the law of God, and the danger of self-deception in the external service of the Lord, I have much need to pray—"Incline my heart to thy testimonies. Give me understanding—save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies."³ And if they are blessed, who seek the Lord *with their whole heart*, how am I seeking him? Alas! with how much distraction; with how little heart-work! Oh! let me "seek his strength" in order to "seek his face."⁴

Lord! search—teach—incline—uphold me. Help me to plead thy gracious promise—"I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: *for they shall return unto me with their whole heart*."⁵

3. *They also do no iniquity; they walk in his ways.*

THIS was not their character from their birth. Once they were *doing* nothing but *iniquity*. It was without mixture, without cessation—from the fountain-head.⁶ Now it is written of them—"they do no iniquity." Once they walked, even as others,⁷ in the way of their own hearts—"enemies to God by wicked works." Now "*they walk in his ways*." They are "new creatures in Christ; old things are passed away; behold! all things are become new."⁸ This is their highly-privileged state—"Sin shall not have dominion over them: for they are not under the law, but under grace."⁹ They are "born of God, and they cannot commit sin: for their seed remaineth in them, and they cannot sin, because they are born of God."¹⁰ Their hatred and resistance of sin are therefore now as instinctive, as was their former enmity and opposition to God. Not indeed that the people of God are as "the saints made perfect," who "*do no iniquity*." This is a dream of

¹ Psalm xxvii. 8.

² Jer. xxix. 13.

³ Verses 36, 125, 145.

⁴ Ps. cv. 4.

⁵ Jer. xxiv. 7.

⁶ "Every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is evil—only evil—continually." And this "God saw"—before whom "all things are naked and open"—who searcheth the heart, and therefore cannot be mistaken. Gen. vi. 5.

But lest we should conceive this to be the picture of some generation of so peculiarly aggravated a character, that the awful demonstration of his wrath could no longer be restrained, this testimony is repeated by the same Omniscient Judge, immediately subsequent to the flood, (Gen. viii. 21,) and confirmed by him in many express declarations. Jer. xvii. 9, 10. Matt. xv. 19.

⁷ Eph. ii. 2, 3. Col. i. 21.

⁸ 2 Cor. v. 17.

⁹ Rom. vi. 14.

¹⁰ 1 John iii. 1.

perfection—unscriptural and self-deluding.¹ The unceasing advocacy of their Heavenly Friend evidently supposes the indwelling power of sin, to the termination of our earthly pilgrimage. The supplication also in the prayer of our Lord teaches them to ask for daily pardon and deliverance from “temptation,” as for “daily bread.”² Yes—to our shame be it spoken—we are sinners still; yet—praised be God!—not “walking after the course,” not “fulfilling the desires,” of sin. The acting of sin is now like the motion of a stone upward, violent and unnatural. If it is not cast out, it is dethroned. We are not, as before, “its willing people,” but its reluctant, struggling captives. It is not “the day of its power.”

And here lies the holy liberty of the Gospel—not, as some have feigned,—a liberty to “continue in sin, that grace may abound;”³ but a deliverance from the guilt and condemnation of *abhorred, resisted, yet still indwelling sin*. When our better will hath cast it off—when we can say in the sight of an heart-searching God, “*What we hate, that do we*”—the responsibility is not ours—“It is not we that do it, but sin that dwelleth in us.”⁴ Still let us inquire, is the promise of deliverance from sin “sweet to us?”⁵ And does our successful resistance in the spiritual conflict realize the earnest of its complete fulfilment? Blessed Jesus! what do we owe to thy cross for the present redemption from its guilt and curse, and much more for the blissful prospect of the glorified state, when this hated guest shall be an inmate no more!⁶ O let us take the very print of thy death into our souls in the daily crucifixion of sin.⁷ Let us know the “power of thy resurrection” in an habitual “walk in newness of life.”⁸

4. *Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.*

WE have seen the character of the Man of God. Let us mark the authority of God, *commanding* him to a *diligent* obedience. The very sight of the *command* is enough for him. He obeys for the *command's* sake, however contrary it may be to his own will. But has he any reason to complain of the yoke? Even under the dispensation which “gendereth unto bondage” most encouraging were the obligations to obedience—“*that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever.*”⁹ Much more, then, we, under a dispensation of love, can never want a motive for obedience! Let the daily mercies of Providence stir up the question—“What shall I render unto the Lord?”¹⁰ Let the far richer mercies of grace produce “a living sacrifice” to be “presented to the Lord.”¹¹ Let “the love of Christ constrain us.”¹² Let the recollection of the “price with which we were bought,” remind us of the Lord's property in us, and of our obligations to “glorify him in our

¹ Comp. Eccl. vii. 20, with Job ix. 20. Phil. iii. 12.

³ Rom. vi. 1, 2.

⁴ Ib. vii. 15—20.

² Matt. vi. 11—13.

⁵ Ib. vi. 14.

⁶ Rev. xxi. 27.

⁷ Rom. vi. 6.

⁸ Phil. iii. 10. Rom. vi. 4, 5.

⁹ Deut. v. 29. Comp. Deut. vi. 17, 18; xxviii. 1, 2.

Jer. vii. 23.

¹⁰ Psalm cxvi. 12.

¹¹ Rom. xii. 1.

¹² 2 Cor. v. 14.

body, and in our spirit, which are his.”¹ Let us only “behold the Lamb of God;” let us hear his wrestling supplications, his deserted cry, his expiring agonies—the price of our redemption; and then let us ask ourselves, Can we want a motive?

But what is the scriptural character of Evangelical obedience? It is the work of the Spirit, enabling us to “obey the truth.”² It is the end of the purpose of God, who “hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.*”³ It is the only satisfactory test of our profession.⁴

Then let me begin my morning with the inquiry—“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” “Teach me thy way, O Lord: I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.”⁵ Let me trade with all my talents for thee: ever watchful, that I may be employed in thy work; setting a guard upon my thoughts, my lips, my tempers, my pursuits, that nothing may hinder, but rather every thing may help me, in *keeping thy precepts diligently.*

But why do I ever find *the precepts* to be “grievous” to me? Is it not that some indolence is indulged; or some “iniquity regarded in my heart;” or some principle of unfaithfulness divides my service with two masters, when I ought to be “following the Lord fully?” Oh! for the spirit of “simplicity and godly sincerity” in *the precepts* of God. Oh! for that warm and constant love, which is the main-spring of devoted diligence in the service of God. Oh! for a larger supply of that “wisdom which is from above,” and which is “without partiality and without hypocrisy!”⁶

5. *O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!*

THE Lord has indeed “*commanded us to keep his precepts.*” But, alas! where is our power? Satan would make the sense of our weakness an excuse for indolence. The Spirit of God convinces us of it, as an incitement to prayer, and an exercise of faith. If, reader, your heart is perfect with God, you “consent to the law that it is good;” you “delight in it after the inner man;”⁷ you would not have one jot or tittle altered, mitigated, or repealed, that it might be more conformed to your own will, or allow you more liberty and self-indulgence in the ways of sin. But do you not sigh to think, that when you aim at the perfect standard of holiness, you should, at your best moments, and in your highest attainments, fall so far below it; seeing indeed the way before you, but feeling yourself without ability to walk in it? Then let a sense of your helplessness for the work of the Lord lead you to the throne of grace, to pray, and watch, and wait, for the strengthening and refreshing influences of the Spirit of grace. Here let your faith realize at one and the same view your utter insufficiency, and your complete All-sufficiency.⁸ Here behold Him, who is ever pre-

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

⁴ Matt. xii. 33. John xiv. 15, 21.

⁶ James iii. 17.

² 1 Peter i. 22.

⁵ Acts ix. 6.

⁷ Rom. vii. 16, 22.

³ Eph. i. 4.

Psalm lxxxvi. 11.

⁸ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

senting himself before God as our glorious Head, receiving in himself, according to the good pleasure of the Father,¹ the full supply for this and every successive moment of inexpressible need. Our work is not therefore left upon our own hands, or wrought out at our "own charges." So long as "He hath the residue of the Spirit,"² "grace" will be found "sufficient"—Divine "strength will be made perfect in weakness."³ "Without him we can do nothing."⁴—"Through Him all things."⁵ Even the "worm Jacob shall thrash the mountains," when the Lord says—"Fear not, I will help thee."⁶

In connecting this verse with the preceding, how accurately is the middle path preserved, equally distant from the idea of self-sufficiency to "*keep the Lord's statutes*," and self-justification in neglecting them! The first attempt to render spiritual obedience will quickly convince us of our utter helplessness. We might as soon create a world, as create in our hearts one pulse of spiritual life. And yet our inability does not cancel our obligation. Shall God lose his right, because sin has palsied our ability? Is not a drunken servant still under his master's law? and is not the sin which prevents him from performing his duty, not his excuse, but his aggravation? Thus our weakness is that of an heart, which "cannot be subject to the law of God," only because it is "carnal, enmity against God."⁷ The obligation therefore remains in full force. Our inability is our sin, our guilt, and condemnation.

What then remains for us, but to return the mandate to heaven, accompanied with an earnest prayer, that the Lord would write upon our hearts those *statutes*, to which he requires obedience in his word?—"Thou hast commanded us to keep thy statutes diligently." We acknowledge, Lord, our obligation; but we feel our impotency. Lord, help us: we look unto thee, "*O that our ways were directed to keep thy statutes!*" "Give what thou commandest; and then command what thou wilt."⁸ Now, as if to exhibit the fulness and suitableness of the promises of the gospel, the commands and prayers are returned back again from heaven with promises of quickening and directing grace. Thus does the Lord fully answer his end with us. He did not issue the commands, expecting that we could turn our own hearts to them; but that the conviction of our entire helplessness might cast us upon him, who loves to be sought, and never will be thus sought in vain. And indeed this is a part of "the mystery of godliness," that in proportion as we depend upon him, who is alike "the Lord our righteousness" and our strength, our desires after holiness will increase, and our prayers become more fervent. He who commands

¹ Col. i. 18, 19.

² Mal. ii. 15.

³ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

⁴ John xv. 5.

⁵ Phil. iv. 13.

⁶ Isa. xli. 14, 15.

⁷ Rom. vii. 7. Compare Genesis xxxvii. 4. John viii. 43; v. 40. 2 Peter ii. 14,—where the moral inability is clearly traced to the love of sin, or the obstinate unbelief of the heart, and therefore is inexcusable. The case of the heathen is traced to the same wilful source, Rom. i. 20—28.

⁸ "Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis."—Augustine.

our duty, perfectly knows our weakness. And he who feels his own weakness is fully encouraged to depend upon the power of his Saviour. Faith is then the principle of evangelical obedience, and the promises of his grace enable us for duty, at the very time that we are commanded to it.¹ In this view are brought together the supreme authority of the Lawgiver, the total insufficiency of the creature, the full provisions of the Saviour, and the all-sufficiency of "the God of all grace." We pray for what we want; we are thankful for what we have; we trust for what is promised. Thus "all is of God." Christ "is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."² Thus "grace reigns" triumphant. The foundation is laid in grace, and the head-stone will be brought forth with shoutings, crying, "Grace, grace unto it!"³—The Saviour's work is finished, and Jesus is crowned Lord of all for ever.

6. *Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.*

THE Lord expects our obedience to be not only "*diligent*," but universal. Willingly to dispense with the least of the *commandments*, proves that we have yet to learn the spirit of acceptable obedience.⁴ Grace is given and suited for all, no less than for one of them, "that we might walk worthy of the Lord *unto all pleasing*."⁵ One lust "regarded in the heart" is sufficient to keep possession for the tyrant, however others may be restrained. Even Herod could "do many things;" and yet his adulterous wife cherished in his bosom, too plainly proved the sovereignty of sin to be undisturbed.⁶ Saul slew all the Amalekites *but one*; and that single exception to universal obedience marked his unsoundness, cost him the loss of his throne, and brought him under the awful displeasure of his God.⁷ And thus the corrupt unmortified member brings the whole body to hell.⁸ Reserves are the canker upon godly sincerity. A secret indulgence—"the rolling of the sweet morsel under the tongue"—"the part of the price kept back"⁹—stamps our service as a robbery, not as an offering. We may be free, sincere, and earnest in many parts of our prescribed duty; but this "root of bitterness" renders the whole an abomination.

Sincerity therefore must be the stamp of my Christian profession. Though utterly unable to render perfect obedience to the least of the commandments, yet my desire and purpose will *have respect unto them all*. I shall no more venture to break the least than the greatest of them; much less shall I ever think of attempting to atone for the breach of one by the performance of the rest. They are indeed many commandments; yet—like links in a chain—they form but one law; and I know who has said—"Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."¹⁰ However the professor may confine his re-

¹ "Quod lex imperat, fides impetrat."

⁴ Matt. v. 19.

⁵ Col. i. 10.

² Rev. xxii. 13.

³ Zech. iv. 7.

⁶ Mark vi. 18—20.

⁷ 1 Sam. xv. 32—21.

⁸ Mark ix. 43—48.

⁹ Acts v. 1, 2.

¹⁰ James ii. 10, 11.

gard to the second table (as if the first were ceremonial, or obsolete, or the regulation of the outward man was the utmost extent of the requirement). I would fix my eye with equal regard to both; yet specially marking any command in either of them, that may appear most directly opposed to my besetting corruptions. Thus "walking in the fear of the Lord," I may hope to walk "in the comfort of the Holy Ghost;"¹ and "hereby shall I know that I am of the truth, and shall assure my heart before God."²

But where, in my strictest walk, is my hope of acceptance, but in Him, whose obedience has "fulfilled all righteousness"³ in my stead, and whose death "has redeemed me from the curse"⁴ of my unrighteousness, when repentance, prayers, and tears, would have been of no avail? Yet it is only in the path of holiness that we can realize our acceptance.⁵ The heart occupied with this world's pleasure, knows nothing of this heavenly joy. Its brightness is dimmed—its freshness fades—its life withers—in the very breath of an unholy world. A godly assurance of the present favor of God must be weakened by self-indulgence, unwatchfulness, allowance of secret sins, or neglect of secret duties. "If thou return to the Almighty"—said a wise man,—"*thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles. Then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God.*"⁶

Let us then carefully examine the character of our assurance. Does it rest simply and exclusively upon the testimony of the Gospel? Will it abide the test of the word of God? Is it productive of tenderness of conscience, watchfulness, and circumspection of conduct? Does it exercise our diligence in adding grace to grace, that we may "make our calling and election sure," and that "an entrance may be ministered to us *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?"⁷ How boldly can we plead our Christian confidence in the path of godliness.—"*I have stuck unto thy testimonies; O Lord, put me not to shame. Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.*"⁸

7. *I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.*

The righteous judgments of God include the whole revelation of his word⁹—so called—as the rule by which he judges our present state, and will pronounce our final sentence.¹⁰ David's attainments here seemed to be as nothing. So much remained unlearned and unknown, that he could only anticipate the time, *when he should have learned them.* "*Thy commandment*"—he exclaims—"is exceeding broad."¹¹ When the Apostle, after twenty years' acquaintance with the gospel, expressed it as the one desire

¹ Acts ix. 31.

² 1 John iii. 19.

³ Matt. iii. 15.

⁴ Gal. iii. 13.

⁵ 1 John i. 7, ii. 5, iii. 21, 24.

⁶ Job xxii, 23, 26.

⁷ 2 Peter i. 5—11.

⁸ Verses 31, 80.

⁹ John iii. 18, 19.

¹⁰ 1b. xii. 48.

¹¹ Verse 96.

of his heart—"That I may know Christ"¹—evidently he entertained the same humbling views of his high attainments, and the same exalted apprehensions of the value of treasures yet unexplored, and progressively opening before him. Thus the wisest saints are only students in the Divine School. Yet whatever their *learning* be, it casts them into the mould and spirit of their doctrine.² Conceit however of knowledge is the greatest enemy to knowledge, and the strongest proof of ignorance; so that, "if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know."—"He deceiveth himself."³

But what is the motive, that enlivens the believer in this holy *learning*? Is it that he may live upon the airy breath of human applause? No, rather that he may "*praise his God with uprightness of heart.*" When our mind is dark, our lips are sealed. But when "he opens our understandings" to "*learn his judgments,*" he will next "open our lips, and our mouths shall show forth his praise."⁴ And this indeed is the end, for which "his people are formed;"⁵ for which they "are called out of darkness into marvellous light."⁶ This is the daily frame, in which our God will be glorified.⁷ Yet must we live as well as sing his praise. "*The praise of the upright heart* will be shown in the holy walk and conversation."⁸

But let us watch, that our *praise* really flows "out of the abundance" of what our hearts have "*learned*" of his "*righteous judgments.*" For do we not sometimes speak of our Saviour with a secret lurking after self-exaltation? May we not really be seeking and serving ourselves in the very act of seeming to serve and honor him? Surely the very thought of the selfishness that defiles our holiest earthly praise, may well quicken our longings after that world of praise, where the flame burns active, bright, incessant; where we shall offer our sacrifices without defilement, without intermission, without weariness, without end.⁹

8. *I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.*

THE resolution to "*keep the Lord's statutes*" is the natural result of having "*learned his righteous judgments.*" But how happily does David combine "*simplicity*" of dependence with "*godly sincerity*" of obedience! Firm in his purpose, but distrustful of his strength, instantly upon forming his resolution, he recollects that the performance is beyond his power; and therefore the next moment, and almost the same moment, he follows it up with prayer—"I will keep thy statutes; O forsake me not utterly." Oh! beware of self-confidence in the Christian course. We stumble or advance, as we lean upon an arm of flesh, or upon an Almighty Saviour. Temporary desertion may be the seasonable

¹ Phil. iii. 10—14.

² Rom. vi. 17.

³ 1 Cor. viii. 2. Gal. vi. 3.

⁴ Ps. li. 15; also ver. 27, 171.

⁵ Isa. xliii. 21.

⁶ 1 Peter ii. 9.

⁷ Psalm l. 23. For an example of the *uprightness of heart* in the service of *praise* here alluded to, see 1 Chron. xxix. 13—18.

⁸ Psalm cxvi. 12—14.

⁹ Rev. iv. 8.

chastisement of spiritual wantonness. When grace has been given in answer to prayer, it was not duly prized, or diligently improved. The "Beloved"—in answer to solicitation—"is come into his garden;" he knocks at the door, but the spouse is "asleep." The answer to prayer was not expected, not waited for, and therefore not enjoyed; and the sleeper awakes too late, and finds herself forsaken by the object of her desire.¹ Again—when we have given place to temptation; ² when "our mountain stands strong;" ³ when love for our Saviour "waxes cold," and our earnestness in seeking him is fainting; ⁴ we must not be surprised, if we are left for a time to the trial of a deserted state.

Yet we sometimes speak of the hidings of God's countenance, as if it were a sovereign act, calling for implicit submission; when the cause should at least be sought for, and will generally be found, in some "secret thing" of indulgence, unwatchfulness, or self-dependence.⁵ It was while David "kept silence" from the language of contrition, that he felt the pressure of the heavy hand of his frowning God;⁶ and may not the darkness, which has sometimes clouded our path, be the voice of our God—"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God."⁷

But in the engagement of the Lord's everlasting covenant, how clear is the warrant of faith!—how ample the encouragement for prayer—"Forsake me not utterly!" David knew and wrote of the Lord's unchangeable faithfulness to his people; and, while he dreaded even a temporary separation from his God more than any worldly affliction, he could plead that gracious declaration—"Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail."⁸ We would not indeed make the promises of grace an encouragement to carelessness: yet it is indispensable to our spiritual establishment that we receive them in their full, free, and sovereign declaration. How many fainting souls have been refreshed by the assurances—"For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee—with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer!" "My sheep shall never perish: neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."⁹ In a lowly, self-abased and dependent spirit we shall best, however, learn to "make our boast in the Lord," "confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in us, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."¹⁰ And even if awhile destitute of sensible consolation, still our language will be—"I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob; and I will look for him."¹¹

Great indeed is the danger and evil to the soul, if we apprehend

¹ Cant. iv. 16, with v. 1—6.

⁴ Cant. iii. 1—4.

⁷ Jer. ii. 19.

¹⁰ Psalm xxxiv. 2. Phil. i. 6.

² 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

⁵ Job xv. 11.

⁸ Psalm lxxxix. 33.

¹¹ Isa. viii. 17.

³ Psalm xxx. 6, 7.

⁶ Psalm xxxii. 3, 4.

⁹ Isa. liv. 7, 8. John x. 28

the Lord to have *forsaken* us, because we are in darkness; or that we are out of the way, because we are in perplexity. These are the very hand-posts, that show us that we are in the way of his own promised leading—painful exercise—faithful keeping—eternal salvation;—"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, *and not forsake them.*"¹ Oh! the rest, the satisfaction of placing a blind implicit confidence in a covenant-keeping God!

Forsaken we may be—but not *utterly*. David was *forsaken*, not like Saul²—Peter was *forsaken*—not like Judas³—*utterly* and for ever. What foreboding have you of such desertion? Is your heart willing to forsake him? Have you no mournings and thirstings for his return? "If indeed you forsake him, he will *forsake* you."⁴ But can you forsake him? Let him do as seemeth him good, (is the language of your heart;) I will wait for him, follow after him, cleave to his word, cling to his cross. Mark his dealings with you. Inquire into their reason. Submit to his dispensation. If he *forsakes*, beg his return: but trust your *forsaking* God. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."⁵ Though my comfort is clouded, my hope remains unchanging, unchangeable—such as I would not resign for the glory of an earthly crown. What are these earnest breathings—this abiding confidence, but his own work in us? And can the Lord "forsake the work of his own hands?"⁶ Sooner should heaven and earth pass, than the faithful engagements of the Gospel be thus broken.⁷

PART II.

9. *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

WHY is the *young man* so especially called to *cleanse his way*? Because God justly claims the first and the best. And is it not a most affecting proof of the alienation of the heart from God, that the youth of man—the bloom and freshness of his mind—his "first

¹ Isa. xlii. 16.

³ Matt. xxvi. 75, with xxvii. 3—5.

⁵ Job xiii. 15. Isa. xlv. 15; 1. 10. Heb. iii. 17, 18.

⁶ Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

² Psalm xxx. 7, with 1 Sam. xxviii. 6, 16.

⁴ 2 Chron. xv. 2. Comp. 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

⁷ Augustine's Paraphrase of this verse is beautifully descriptive of the believer's conflict in a state of temporary desertion. "O Lord, if—lest I should be proud, and should say in my prosperity, I shall never be removed—it pleaseth thee to tempt me, yet forsake me not over-long;" that is, if thou hast thus forsaken me, that I may know how weak I am without thy help, yet "*forsake me not utterly,*" lest I perish. I know that of thy good will thou hast given me strength; and if thou turnest away thy face from me, I shall forthwith be troubled. "O forsake me not, that I perish not."

love"—should naturally be devoted to the service of sin? Ever since fallen man "begat a son in his own likeness," "the imagination of man's heart has been evil from his youth."¹ For "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?"² And never does the heart utter the cry, "My Father! thou art the guide of my youth,"³ until the misery of wandering without a guide has been painfully felt. And even when Divine grace has awakened the desire to return homewards, the habit of wandering from God, and the long-cherished pollutions of sin, seem to form an almost invincible barrier to progress.

The fearful power of "youthful lusts," and the madness with which the heart is hurried into forbidden indulgences, give solemn weight to the inquiry—"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" And the answer is ready. Let him "take heed thereto according to the word." Thus did Joseph⁴ and Daniel with his young companions⁵ "cleanse their way" in the defilement of an heathen atmosphere. It was probably the recollection of this purifying efficacy of *the word*, that induced the venerable Beza to mention in his will, among his chief matters of thankfulness to God, the mercy of having been called to the knowledge of the truth at the age of sixteen; thus, during a course of more than seventy years' walk with God, "escaping the pollutions of the world through lust." But the "*way can only be cleansed*" by the cleansing of the heart; for how can a corrupt fountain "send forth" other than "bitter waters?"⁶ "Out of the heart are the issues of life." Hence the urgent need to cry—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."⁷

How precious, therefore, is *the word of God*, as the means of this cleansing operation! When our Saviour had been setting forth himself as "the way, the truth, and the life," and exhibiting the high privilege of union with himself—"Now," he adds, "*ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*"⁸ This is "the truth," which he pleaded with his Father as the means of our sanctification.⁹ This sets out our purifying hope.¹⁰ Here are the promises, by which we "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."¹¹ Thus is restored to man that golden "crown"—the stamp of his Maker's holiness—which "fell from his head when he sinned."¹²

But oh! how does the recollection force itself upon us,—that our way wants daily *cleansing*! so defiled are our actions, our thoughts, our motives,—nay more, our prayers and services. Let us then "*take heed according to the word of God*"—specially thankful for its

¹ Gen. v. 3; viii. 21.

² Job xiv. 4.

³ Jer. iii. 4.

⁴ Gen. xxxix. 9.

⁵ Dan. i. 8—20; iii. 12—18.

⁶ James iii. 11, 12.

⁷ Prov. iv. 23. Psalm li. 10.

⁸ John xiv.; xv. 1—3.

⁹ Ib. xvii. 17.

¹⁰ 1 John iii. 3.

¹¹ 2 Cor. vii. 1. Comp. 2 Peter i. 4. Augustine's recorded account of his own conversion furnishes a striking illustration of this subject. Confessions, Books viii. ix. The substance of it may be found in Milner's Church History, vol. ii. 353—356. See Dr. Owen's valuable work on the Spirit for a most instructive use made of it, as throwing light upon the doctrine of conversion. Book iii. chap. vi.

¹² Lam. v. 16, with Gen. i. 27. Eph. iv. 24.

heavenly light, which guides us to the "fountain that is opened for sin and for uncleanness."¹ Let us also under the same Divine light seek for the daily sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults."² 'Cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit.'³

10. *With my whole heart have I sought thee; O let me not wander from thy commandments.*

ATTENTION to the word, however important,⁴ can never be practically effective without earnest prayer. Indeed this is a character of the Lord's people—"a generation of *seekers*,"⁵ and yet how much do we lose of the comfort of our religion, and obscure the glory of our profession, by neglecting to bring "*our whole heart*" to this work! When sin is vigorous, and our spiritual affections are dull, and various hindrances combine in prayer; at this crisis strong faith is needed to overcome and to persevere. But here the soul too commonly yields to the difficulty, and contents itself either with heartless complainings, or with just sufficient exertion to quiet the voice of conscience, and produce a delusive peace within. But the Lord will not be found thus. His promise is not to such seekers as these; and if we are satisfied with this state, we must look for a very scanty measure of spiritual success, accompanied with the total absence of spiritual enjoyment. In a far different spirit David could appeal—"With my whole heart have I sought thee." And this assurance, instead of procuring self-confidence, will so far as it is genuine, invariably show itself in a prayerful acknowledgment of our weakness—"O let me not wander from thy commandments." Yet the feeblest desire and attempt to seek the Lord, is the Spirit's rising beam in the heart, a "day of small things" not to be "despised."⁶ It is distinguished from every other principle by the simplicity of its object—"This one thing I do." "One thing have I desired of the Lord; that will I seek after."⁷ My God! my Saviour! "*with my whole heart have I sought thee.*" The desire of my soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early."⁸

When the soul is thus conscious of "following the Lord fully," there is a peculiar *dread of wandering*. In a careless or half-hearted state, wanderings are not watched, so long as they do not lead to any open declensions. Secret prayer will be hurried over, worldly thoughts unresisted, waste of time in frivolous pursuits indulged, without much concern. Not so, when the heart is *fully* in pursuit of its object. There is a carefulness, lest wandering thoughts should become habitual. There is a resistance of the first step, that might lead into a devious path. The soul remembers the "wormwood and the gall,"⁹ "the roaring lion," and the devour-

¹ Zech. xiii. 1.

⁴ Verse 9.

⁷ Phil. iii. 13. Psalm xxvii. 4.

² Psalm xix. 12.

⁵ Psalm xxiv. 6.

⁸ Isa. xxvi. 8, 9.

³ Prayer-Book.

⁶ Zech. iv. 10.

⁹ Lam. iii. 19.

ing wolf; and in the recollection of the misery of its former wandering, dreads any departure from the Shepherd's fold. This blessed state of mind the flock of Christ should cherish with godly jealousy. Yet let it be remembered, that daily progress in the heavenly walk is not maintained by yesterday's grace. Humble and dependent prayer must fetch in a fresh supply continually—"O let me not wander from thy commandments." 'Lord, I feel my heart so prone to wander. My affections are often scattered to the ends of the earth. "Unite my heart to fear thy name."¹ Concentrate every thought, every desire, in thyself, as the one object of attraction.'

11. *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

WHAT an aggregate of guilt and misery is comprehended in this short word "sin"—the greatest curse that ever entered the universe of God, and the parent of every other curse! Its guilt is aggravated beyond the conception of thought. Injury to a Superior—a Father—a Sovereign! Its power is misery, wherever it extends—in the heart—in the family—in the world. In eternity its power is unrestrained. Sometimes the death-bed scene casts a fearful gleam of light upon "the worm that never dieth, and the fire that never shall be quenched;"² but experience only can develop its full-grown horrors. How supremely important therefore is the object of our preservation from sin! and how wisely adapted are the means to the end! That *word*—which the man of God had just before mentioned as the guide to the *cleansing of the way*,³—he *hides within his heart*—not for concealment, but for security,⁴ that it may be ready for constant use.⁵ It is not therefore a mere acquaintance with *the word*, that will avail us. There must be a cordial assent—a sound digestion—a constant respect. It must be to us the rule that we would not transgress—the treasure that we are afraid to lose.⁶ Often indeed Satan shuts out its entrance. He "catches away that which was sown." Too often, again, it is withered or choked in the soil. But "the honest and good heart" "*hides it*, keeps it, and brings forth fruit with patience, unto perfection."⁷ Here it "dwells richly in all wisdom,"⁸ the storehouse, as occasion requires; a principle of holiness; a covering from sin. In this view it is recommended by one, who had well acquainted himself with its valuable uses—"My son, let them not" (the Divine precepts) "depart from thine eyes; keep sound wisdom and discretion. So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble."⁹ David also gives us the same experience—"By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer."¹⁰ And it was probably this recollection, combined with a sense of

¹ Psalm lxxxvi. 11.

² Mark ix. 44.

³ Verse 9.

⁴ Matt. xxv. 25. Ps. xi. 10, with Ex. xxv. 21. Job xxii. 22.

⁵ Joshua i. 8.

⁶ Matt. xiii. 44.

⁷ Luke viii. 15, with the whole parable.

⁸ Col. iii. 16.

⁹ Prov. iii. 21—24. Compare Prov. ii. 10—15.

¹⁰ Ps. xvii. 4.

continual danger, that suggested the prayer—"Order my steps in thy word; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."¹

The value of *the word* is inestimable, as our means of walking with God in the hurry, business, and temptation of the day. The Psalms furnish precious materials for ejaculatory prayer; the promises food for comfort;² the rules such light in perplexity;³ the instruction such solid matter for godly conference⁴—all operating for one end—a preservation from sin. Being from *the word*—a manifestation of the Saviour's love—what a keeping of the heart! what a quickening motive! How seasonable in worldly temptation is the warning of *the word hid* in the heart—"No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God!"⁵ So in the spiritual conflict, let this *word*—"Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out"—be *hid in the heart*—what a preservative is it against unbelief!⁶ Take *the word* to the unbelieving believer, (if the expression may be allowed,) alarmed by ridicule or persecution—"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."⁷—Fearing that he shall never hold out unto the end; "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."⁸—Trembling, lest his sins should rise up to his condemnation; "The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth from all sin."⁹ And then as to duties: Let his Saviour's *word* rebuke his indolence and unwatchfulness,—“What! could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch, and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.”¹⁰ Hide in the heart the sorrowful story of his agony in the garden, and his death on the cross, that “sin may appear yet more exceeding sinful.”

But how is *the word* to gain entrance into hearts like ours? How shall it be “*hid*” in so unkindly a soil? No power of man surely can plant it there. The Holy Spirit's almighty agency must be diligently sought; for in proportion as we are filled with his gracious influences, shall we be armed, as was our Master, for the effectual resistance of our spiritual temptations.¹¹

Lastly, connected with this subject, mark *the Christian's character*—"In whose heart is my law."¹²—*His security*—"None of his steps shall slide."¹³—*His happiness*—"O how I love thy law!"¹⁴—*His victory*—"The word of God abideth in him, and he hath overcome the wicked one."¹⁵—All infallibly provided by the covenant-promise—"I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts."¹⁶ O let us not then shrink from a close contact with *the word*, though the cost may be the cutting off a right hand for the saving of the life. There is no better test of our security, than a willingness to come to the searching light of *the word*.¹⁷

¹ Verse 133.

⁴ Col. iii. 16.

⁷ Ib. xv. 18.

¹⁰ Matt. xxvi. 40, 41.

¹³ Psalm xxxvii. 31.

¹⁶ Jer. xxxi. 33.

² Verses 50, 92.

⁵ Luke ix. 61, 62.

⁸ Heb. xiii. 5.

¹¹ Comp. Luke iv. 1—12.

¹⁴ Verse 97.

¹⁷ Comp. John iii. 20, 21.

³ Verse 105. Prov. iii. 5, 6.

⁶ John vi. 37.

⁹ 1 John i. 7.

¹² Isaiah li. 7.

¹⁵ 1 John ii. 14, with Eph. vi. 17.

12. *Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes.*

"Praise is comely for the upright."¹ It is at once their duty and their privilege. But what does its highest exercise amount to, when placed on the ground of its own merit? We clothe our ideas with magnificence of language, and deck them out with all the richness of imagery; and perhaps we are pleased with our forms of praise. But what are they in his sight beyond the offering of a contemptible worm, spreading before its Maker its own mean and low notions of Divine Majesty? If a worm were to raise its head, and cry—"O sun! thou art the source of light and heat to a widely-extended universe"—it would, in fact, render a higher praise to the sun, than we can ever give to our Maker. Between it and us there is some proportion—between us and God none. Yet, unworthy as the offering confessedly is, he will not despise it. Nay, more,—instead of spurning it from his presence, he has revealed himself as "inhabiting the praises of Israel,"²—intimating to us, that the service of praise is "set forth in his sight as incense;" and at the same time, that it should be the daily unceasing exercise of one at his own home.

The true character of praise, however, depends entirely upon the state of the heart. In the contemplative philosopher it is only cheering barren admiration: in the believer it becomes a principle of comfort and encouragement. For, can he forget "the revelation" which his God has given of himself in the gospel of his dear Son; how it divests every attribute of its terrors, and shines before us in all the glory of his faithfulness and love? The ascription of praise—"Blessed art thou, O Lord"—frames itself therefore into the prophet's song—"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage! He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy."³

Truly then he is "*blessed*" in himself, and delights to communicate his blessedness to his people. Hence we are emboldened to ask for continual "*teaching in his statutes*"⁴—in the truths which he has revealed, and the precepts which he has enjoined! that we may "be followers of him, as dear children," and "walk with him in love."⁵ The practical influence, however, of Divine light constitutes its peculiar privilege. Man's teaching puffeth up—God's teaching humbleth. Man's teaching may lead us into error as well as into truth—God's teaching is "the unction from the Holy One, by which we know all things."⁶ Man's teaching may make us more learned—God's teaching makes us more holy. It persuades, while it enlightens. It draws the heart, inclines the will, and carries out the soul to Christ.⁷ The tried character of God encourages us to look for his teaching—"Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will he teach sinners in the way."⁸ Our

¹ Psalm xxxiii. 1, 2.² Psalm xxii. 3.³ Micah vii. 18.⁴ The same acknowledgment and plea are made in verses 64, 68.⁵ Eph. v. 1, 2.⁶ 1 John ii. 20.⁷ John vi. 44, 45.⁸ Ps. xxv. 8.

warrant is especially confirmed in approaching him as our covenant God—"Lead me in thy truth, and *teach me; for thou art the God of my salvation. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God.*"¹

Reader! do you desire to praise your God? Then learn to frequent the new and living way, "by which alone you can offer your sacrifice acceptably."² And while engaged in this holy service, inquire, surrounded as you are with the means of instruction, what progress you are making in *his statutes*. Seek to have a deeper acquaintance with the character of God. Seek to be the vessels of honor and glory, into which he is pouring more and more continually, "until they be filled with all the fulness of God."³ Value the unspeakable blessing of Divine teaching, by which you learn to live the life, and begin the *blessedness of God*.

13. *With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.*

We have seen the *word hid in the heart*; now we see it poured forth from *the lips*. The *Lord has taught us his statutes*; now we *declare these judgments of his mouth*; but who can *declare* them with unction and power, save those who are *taught of God*? Now we are introduced to the high and honorable privilege of becoming a witness for our Saviour!⁴ Our opportunities of service are our talents, and we trade with a large increase; for "to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance."⁵ But—"our lips are our own,"⁶—is the proud language of the world. Blessed be God; "we know that we are not our own."⁷ Most gladly do we acknowledge, that he, who fashioned our lips, has the best claim to their service. And when he has added to the claim of creation the right of purchase,⁸ what further constraining can we need, to induce the consecration of all that we are, and all that we have, to his glory!

This is a family obligation—*To declare the judgments of God's mouth*. Thus did Abraham obtain a blessing for his children.⁹ Heavenly blessings are the gracious reward of thus honoring our God.¹⁰ This also is the material of our general intercourse—fruitful in spiritual results. Thus did Andrew bring Peter,¹¹ and the woman of Samaria, her neighbors,¹² to Jesus. What might we not do for our fellow sinners, if our intercourse with them was the overflowing of a heart filled with love; guided by a single desire to glorify our Saviour, and to edify his church! Fearful indeed is the guilt of sinful silence; and those, who thus prove their unfaithfulness to God, may well tremble at his awful denunciations. And yet it is possible to be bold in speech for God, when in the closet, the family, or the world, our consciences justly convict us of insincerity.—"Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thy-

¹ Ps. cxliii. 10.

⁴ Phil. ii. 16.

⁷ 1 Cor. vi. 19.

¹⁰ Deut. xi. 18—21.

² Heb. x. 20, xiii. 15. 1 Pet. ii. 5.

⁵ Matt. xxv. 29.

⁸ Ib. 20.

¹¹ John i. 40—42.

³ Eph. iii. 19.

⁶ Psalm xii. 4.

⁹ Gen. xviii. 19.

¹² Ib. iv. 29, 30.

self?"¹ Let us seek therefore to have our hearts "filled with the Spirit;"² else our "talk of the lips tendeth only to penury."³

This subject illustrates the *character* of the Lord's people—"The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment;"⁴ *their resolution*—"My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof;"⁵ *their prayer*—"O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise;"⁶ *their blessing*—"The lips of the righteous feed many. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life."⁷ The example of the Saviour, here as everywhere, is our perfect and encouraging pattern: "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation; lo! I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest."⁸ In this spirit of their Master, the Apostles awed their persecutors into forbearance—"We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."⁹

How sinful is it to employ our lips for any but the Lord! Yet not less sinful is our reluctance to employ them for him! Surely the day—when perhaps we have been fluent in worldly conversation, and yet have neglected our opportunities for speaking a word for him, must be considered a lost day! Is there not much cause for watchfulness, prayer, and self-denial; lest our silence should deny him, whom by every obligation we are bound to confess? If our inability to bear a testimony for our Lord is not painful to us,¹⁰ must we not suspect, if not the sincerity, at least the strength of our attachment to his precious name? and we can do no better than retire into our closets with the prayer of contrition—"Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord."¹¹

14. *I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.*

How natural is it to be speaking of that which is our delight! The man of God was always *declaring the Lord's judgments*, because they were his *rejoicing*. There is indeed a real joy in despising earthly joys. "How sweet," said Augustine, referring to the period of his conversion, "was it in a moment to be free from those delightful vanities, to lose which had been my dread; to part with which was now my joy!"¹² More satisfying is the believer's rejoicing in the way of God, than that of the miser in his untold riches.¹³ Here he may safely say to his soul—"Soul, thou hast much goods

¹ Romans ii. 21.

⁴ Ps. xxxvii. 30.

⁷ Prov. x. 21, xv. 4.

¹⁰ Compare Psalm xxxix. 1, 2. Jer. xx. 9.

² Eph. v. 18, 19.

⁵ Ib. lxxi. 15.

⁸ Ps. xl. 9, 10, with Luke iv. 16—22.

¹² "Quas amittere metus erat, jam dimittere gaudium fuit."—Aug. Confess. Book ix.

³ Prov. xiv. 23, with x. 19.

⁶ Ib. li. 15.

⁹ Acts iv. 20.

¹¹ Psalm. cxliii. 2.

Never man in his unregenerate state, by his own confession, more strongly illustrated the truth of our Lord's declaration—"Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John viii. 34, with 2 Peter ii. 19.) He describes himself actually as "wallowing in the mire," with as much delight as if he were rolling himself in a bed of spices, or perfuming himself with the most precious ointment. ("Volutare in cæno, tanquam cinnamoniis et unguentis pretiosis.") Yet when the word pierced his heart, and brought a new bias and taste into his soul, how delightfully is his language changed in the recollection of his past "excess of riot!" "Quam sauve est istis suavitatibus carere!"

¹³ Verses 72, 127.

laid up for many years; take thine ease." And these are the only riches within the reach of all. If we are poor in this world, it is the Lord's providence. If we are poor in grace it is our own fault. It is because we have despised our Lord's counsel to buy of him, "gold tried in the fire, that we may be rich."¹ And what is this enriching portion?—"Things present and things to come:"² something enjoyed, and much more expected: the mercies of eternity added to the blessings of time; the riches of both worlds—all assured to him by the covenant of grace "*in the way of the Lord's testimonies.*" Is it not then most strange, that with such treasure in possession and in prospect, the child of God should be so careless in increasing his store, and in confirming his own interest in it? But the *riches of God's testimonies* have this peculiar property, that they cease to rejoice the heart, when they are not uppermost there. Have there not been times, when we have actually rejoiced in the accession of some worldly good, or the accomplishment of some worldly desire, more than in this heavenly treasure? What then do we count our *riches*? To thrive in grace, or in the world? to be rich towards God, or for our own indulgence?

But though we would *rejoice in the testimonies*, and would not, for all this world can afford, lose a verse or letter of our Bibles, yet we cannot be satisfied with a general interest. Many texts—doctrinal, practical, or experimental—have been specially sealed by the Divine Spirit upon our hearts.³ This or that promise—yea, all the land of promise, as much as I can set my foot upon—is mine. Of these precious *testimonies*, shall we not increase our little stock, until we have apprehended the full enjoyment of the whole; if indeed the fulness of that which is called "unsearchable"⁴ can ever be, in this life at least, completely enjoyed?

But it is not so much in the Lord's testimonies, as "*in the way of them,*" that David rejoiced—the way to God, of which they testify⁵—"the way of holiness,"⁶ in which they lead—the narrow way of the cross—so contrary to our natural desires and inclinations, that none but the true sheep of Christ can ever enter, or continue in it. Who that walks in these *ways* will fail to find them, in duties no less than in privileges, "paths of pleasantness and peace?" Our happiness is not withered, but flourishing. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."⁷

15. *I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.*

Our *rejoicing in the testimonies of God* will naturally flow in an habitual *meditation in them.*⁸ The thoughts follow the affections. They are no burden to the carnal man, so far as his heart

¹ Rev. iii. 18.

² 1 Cor. iii. 22.

³ "This is my Scripture," Origen used to say of such texts.

⁴ Eph. iii. 18.

⁵ John xiv. 6, with v. 39.

⁶ Isaiah xxxv. 8.

⁷ Jer. vi. 16.

⁸ Verse 97. Psalm i. 2.

is in them. But having no spiritual taste, he has no ability for spiritual *meditation*. Indeed many sincere Christians, through remaining weakness and depravity, are too often reluctant to it. They are content with indolent reading: and, with scarcely a struggle or a trial, yield themselves up to the persuasion, that they are unable sufficiently to abstract their minds for this blessed employment. But let the trial prove the work. Perseverance will accomplish the victory over mental instability, and the spiritual difficulty will give way to prayer—"Lord, help me." The fruitfulness of this employment will soon be manifest. Does it not "stir up the gift of God that is in us,"¹ and keep the energies of the heart in a wakeful posture of conflict and resistance? Besides this, it is the digestive faculty of the soul, which converts the word into real and proper nourishment: so that this revolving of a single verse in our minds is often better than the mere reading of whole chapters. "Thy words were found, and *I did eat them*; and thy word was unto me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart."² Thus the mind becomes the instrument of faith and love—of joy and strength.

But this meditation not only includes the stated times of thought, but the train of holy thoughts, that passes through the mind during the busy hours of the day. This maintains an habitual flow of spiritual desires, and excites the flame of love within, till at length the Psalmist's resolution becomes the inwrought habit of our minds—"I will meditate in thy precepts."

Can we want a subject for meditation, if indeed the salvation of Jesus has been made known to our souls? While musing upon this glorious theme, does not "the fire burn"³ within, as if our hearts were touched with a live coal from the altar of God? Chide then, believer, thy dull and sluggish spirit, that suffers the precious manna to lie ungathered upon the ground, that is slow to entertain these heavenly thoughts, or rather that heavenly guest, whose peculiar office it is to "help our infirmities,"⁴ and especially to "take of Christ's, and show it unto us."⁵

The exercise, however, of this, as of every other duty, may prove a barren form, that imparts neither pleasure nor profit.⁶ Let each of us then ask—What distinct experimental benefit have I received from the word? Do I endeavor to read it with prayerful meditation, until I find my heart filled with it?

But this communing with the word is not for contemplation, but for practice.⁷ By *meditating on God's precepts*, we learn to have

¹ 2 Tim. i. 6.

² Jer. xv. 16. "Meditation is that exercise of mind, whereby it recalls a known truth, as some kinds of creatures do their food, to be ruminated upon, until the nutritious parts are extracted, and fitted for the purposes of life."—Bishop Horne on this verse.

³ Ps. xxxix. 3, and comp. Ps. xlv. 1.

⁴ Rom. viii. 26.

⁵ John xvi. 14, 15.

⁶ "If a chapter be read with the eye merely, while the mind remains inattentive, and the book be shut as soon as the chapter is finished, and thus, what has been read immediately escapes the memory; what is there to surprise, if, after the whole Bible has been several times read through, we discover in ourselves no increase of piety and devotion?"—Professor Franck.

⁷ Joshua i. 8.

respect unto his ways—carefully “pondering the path of our feet,” that we “turn not aside.”¹ *Thy loving kindness is before mine eyes; and I have walked in thy truth.*² “My foot,” saith Job, “hath held his steps; his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; *I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.*”³

16. *I will delight myself⁴ in thy statutes; I will not forget thy word.*

As *delight* quickens to *meditation*⁵ so does the practical habit of *meditation* strengthen the principle of *delight*. In the enjoyment of this delight the Christian (however small his attainments may be) would rather live and die, than in the pursuit, and even in the possession of the most satisfying pleasures of a vain and empty world. But if it be a real “*delight in the Lord's statutes,*” it will be universal—when they probe the secret lurking-places within, and draw out to the full light the hidden indulgences of a heart that is yet “carnal;”⁶ when they call for the entire crucifixion of every corrupt inclination, and the unreserved surrender of all to the self-denying service of our God. This spirit is very different from the *delight* of the hypocrite, which is rather “to know,” than to do the “ways of his God;”⁷ and therefore which is satisfied with outward conformity, with little or no desire to “understand the errors of his heart,” that he might be “cleansed from secret faults.”⁸ The spring of our obedience will therefore prove its sincerity; and the reality of our love will be manifested by its fruitfulness and active cheerfulness in our appointed sphere of duty.

We may also observe here an evidence of adoption, when obedience is not a burden, but a *delight*. The servant may *perform* the statutes of God, but it is only the Son who “*delights in them.*” But what—we may ask—is the spring of adoption? It is “the Spirit of the Son sent into our hearts, whereby we cry ‘Abba, Father.’”⁹ It is because we are at peace with God through Jesus Christ; because the *statutes* are the message of reconciliation through him, that they become delightful to those who are partakers of this great salvation. The spirit of adoption, therefore, as the principle of delight, is the spring of acceptable obedience in the Lord's service.

And surely those who are serving him in this happy filial walk are not likely to “*forget his word.*” As the eye is continually turned to the object of its affection, so the eye of the soul, that has been fixed with *delight* on the ways of God, will be habitually resting upon them. As one of the wise heathens observed—“I never yet heard of a covetous old man, who had forgotten where he had buried his treasure.”¹⁰ The reason is abundantly evident.

¹ Prov. iv. 26, 27.

² Psalm xxvi. 3.

³ Job xxiii. 11, 12.

⁴ “I will solace and recreate myself.”—Ainsworth. A beautiful illustration of the refreshment of the word, when the mind is tired out with the toilsome encumbering cares of the world.

⁵ Verses 14, 15.

⁶ See Rom. vii. 14. 1 Cor. iii. 1, 3.

⁷ Isaiah lviii. 2.

⁸ Psalm xix. 12.

¹⁰ Gal. iv. 6.

¹¹ “Nec vero quenquam senum audivi oblitum, quo loco thesaurum obruisset.”—Cicero de Senectute. Compare Matt. vi. 21

His heart is in it. And this explains the forgetfulness of the ungodly or the formalist. They have no *delight in the statutes*. And who is not glad to *forget* what is distasteful? But if we "have tasted that the Lord is gracious"—if we have found a treasure in the way of his testimonies—we cannot *forget* the sweetness of the experience, or where to go to refresh ourselves with the repetition of it.

Forgetfulness of the word is, however, to the Christian, a source of continual complaint, and sometimes also of most distressing temptation. Not that there is always a real charge of guilt upon the conscience. For, as Boston somewhat quaintly observes—"Grace makes a good heart-memory, even where there is no good head-memory." But means must be used, and helps may be suggested. Watchfulness against the influence of the world is of the first importance. How much of the good seed is choked by the springing thorns! If our hearts are ever refreshed with spiritual delight, we should be as cautious of an uncalled-for advance into the world, as of exposing an invalid's susceptible frame to a damp or unhealthy atmosphere. Whatever warmth had been kindled in spiritual duties, may be chilled by one moment's unwary rush into an unkindly clime. We must also recommend increasing attention to the word, as the means of its preservation²—the exercise of "faith," without which it will "not profit"³ the active habit of love, bringing with it a more habitual interest in the statutes⁴—all accompanied with unceasing prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit, made the express subject of promise for this purpose.⁵ Under this heavenly teaching and recollections, what *delight* will be found *in the statutes!* what blessed remembrance of his word! And what a happy spirit is their *delight and remembrance of the word*—the affections glowing—the memory pondering—the presence and manifestation of truth keeping the heart in close communion with God! "O Lord God, *keep this for ever* in the imagination of the thoughts of the hearts of thy people and prepare their hearts unto thee."⁶

PART III.

17. *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.*

THIS prayer appears to have been much upon David's heart, and in the substance and object of it is again repeated.⁷ Nor does he

¹ Matt. xiii. 22.

² Heb. ii. 1.

³ Ib. iv. 2.

⁴ Verse 15.

⁵ John xiv. 26.

⁶ 1 Chron. xxix. 18.

⁷ Verse 77.

fail to acknowledge the answer to it.¹ The believer like David, is a man of large expectations. As regards himself—his own daily provocations and backslidings—he cannot stand upon his own ground. But when he brings with him the name, the blood, the intercession of Jesus, as soon could God deny his own beloved Son, as resist the supplication of those who present this all-prevailing plea.² Nay—is not this his own gift to his children, as the pledge of every other gift?³ And what other pledge can they need, to encourage them to draw nigh with the largest desire, and the most heavenly expectation? We may indeed be too bold in our manner of approach to God;⁴ but we cannot be too bold in our expectations from him. Standing as we do upon such high and sure ground, it is equally dishonorable to him, and impoverishing to ourselves, to ask only a little of him. Rather let us, according to his own command, “open our mouths wide; and he will fill them.”⁵ Rather let us expect that he will *deal*—not only favorably—but *bountifully with his servants*—that, as “our God, he will supply all our need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”⁶

And, indeed, the most experienced believer cannot forget, that he is in himself still the same poor, weak, empty, helpless creature as at first. Nothing therefore short of a *bountiful* supply can answer his emergency. Such a supply is always at hand. The act of prayer increases the power to pray. The throne of grace is a well, which no power or malice of the Philistines can stop up.⁷

We need not say,—“We have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep.”⁸ Faith will enable us “with joy to draw water out of this well of salvation.”⁹ Let us bring our empty vessels, until “there is not a vessel more.”¹⁰ Yes—believer—there is indeed a *bountiful* supply of grace—of every kind—suited to every want—grace to pardon—grace to quicken—grace to bless. Oh! see, then, that you come not empty away. Remember—who it is that pleads before the throne. Remember—that the grace you need is in his hand. From eternity he foreknew your case. He laid your portion by. He has kept it for the time of need; and now he only waits for an empty vessel into which to pour his supply. He is ready to show you, how infinitely his grace exceeds all thoughts—all prayers—all desires—all praises.

And say—what has been the fruit of your pleading, waiting expectancy at “the throne of grace?” Have you not returned thence with a fresh spring of devotedness in this service, with every selfish thought forgotten in the desire, that you “*may live and keep his word.*” Nothing touched or moved your reluctant heart, but the apprehension of *bountiful* redeeming love. This makes obedience easy—delightful—natural—in a manner unavoidable. It “constrains”¹¹

¹ Verse 65. Comp. Ps. xiii. 6; cxvi. 7, 8. ² John xvi. 23, 24. ³ Rom. viii. 32.

⁴ A beautiful example of reverential approach, and of the acceptance manifested, is given in Abram's history, (Gen. xvii. 3,) and is in some degree illustrated by the private records of Luther.—Note on verses 147, 148.

⁵ Psalm lxxxi. 10.

⁶ Phil. iv. 19.

⁷ Com. Gen. xxvi. 15.

⁸ John iv. 11.

⁹ Isaiah xii. 3.

¹⁰ Comp. 2 Kings iv. 3—6.

¹¹ 2 Cor. v. 14.

to it. The man now *lives*—not the animal life of appetite—not the sensual life of vanity and pleasure—but the only life that deserves the name. He lives singly, supremely “to him that died for him, and rose again.”¹ He “*lives, and keeps his word.*” His motto and character now is—“To me to live is Christ.”² He values life only by its opportunities of serving his God.³ The first archangel knows not a higher object of existence. And how encouraging the reflection, that in this glorious object the meanest servant in the household of God is an equal participant with the most blessed inhabitant of heaven!

18. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

In order to *keep God's word*, must we not pray to understand it? What then is the prayer? Not—give me a plainer Bible—but *open mine eyes* to know my Bible. Not—show me some new revelations beside *the law*—but make me *behold the wonders of the law*. David had acquired in the Divine school “more understanding than all his teachers;”⁴ yet he ever comes to his God under a deep sense of his blindness. Indeed, those who have been best and longest taught are always the most ready to “sit at the feet of Jesus,”⁵ as if they had everything to learn. It is an unspeakable mercy to know a little, and at the same time to feel that it is only a little. We shall then be longing to know more, and yet anxious to know nothing, except as we are taught of God. There are indeed in *God's law* things so *wondrous*, that “the angels desire to look into them.”⁶ The exhibition of the scheme of redemption is in itself a world of wonders. The display of justice exercised in the way of mercy, and of mercy glorified in the exercise of justice, is a wonder, that must fill the intelligent universe of God with everlasting astonishment. And yet these “*wondrous things*” are hid from multitudes, who are most deeply interested in the knowledge of them. They are “hid,” not only from the ignorant and unconcerned, but “from the wise and prudent; and revealed” only “to babes;”⁷—to those who practically acknowledge that important truth, that a man “can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.”⁸ External knowledge is like the child spelling the letters without any apprehension of the meaning. It is like reading a large and clear print with a thick veil before our eyes. Oh! how needful then is the prayer—‘Unveil!’—“*Open thou mine eyes:*” let the veil be taken away from the law, that I may understand it; and from my heart, that I may receive it!

But do not even Christians often find the word of God to be as a sealed book? They go through their accustomed portion, without gaining any increasing acquaintance with light, life and power, and without any distinct application of its contents to their hearts. And thus it must be, whenever reading has been unaccompanied

¹ 2 Cor. v. 15. ² Phil. i. 21. Comp. Acts xiii. 36. ³ Ib. 20. ⁴ Verses 99, 100.

⁵ Luke x. 39. ⁶ 1 Peter i. 12. ⁷ Matt. xi. 25. ⁸ John iii. 27.

⁹ “Revela oculos meos. Velamen detraha oculis meis.”—Poli Synopsis. Margin, Reveal. Compare 2 Cor. iii. 14—16.

with prayer for Divine influence. For we not only need to have our "*eyes open to behold*" fresh wonders, but also to give a more spiritual and transforming¹ perception of those wonders, which we have already beheld.

But are we conscious of our blindness? Then let us hear the counsel of our Lord, that we "anoint our eyes with eye-salve, that we may see."² The recollection of the promises of Divine teaching are fraught with encouragement. The Spirit is freely and abundantly promised in this very character, as "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God."³ If therefore we desire a clearer insight into these "*wondrous things*" of revelation—if we would behold the glorious beauty of our Immanuel—if we would comprehend something more of the immeasurable extent of that love, with which "God so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son"⁴—and of that equally incomprehensible love, which moved that Son so cheerfully to undertake our cause,⁵ we must make daily, hourly use of this important petition—"Open thou mine eyes."⁶

19. *I am a stranger in the earth; hide not thy commandments from me.*

SUCH is the condition of the child of God—a *stranger in the earth!* This confession, however, from a solitary wanderer would have had little comparative meaning. But in the mouth of one, who was probably surrounded with every source of worldly enjoyment, it shows at once the vanity of "earth's best joys," and the heavenly tendency of the religion of the Bible. This has been ever the character, confession, and glory of the Lord's people.⁶ We "would not live always,"⁷ and gladly do we hear the warning voice that reminds us to "arise and depart, for this is not our rest."⁸ And was not this especially the character not of David only, but of David's Lord? Born at an inn⁹—not "having where to lay his head"¹⁰—suffering hunger¹¹—subsisting upon alms¹²—neglected by his own¹³—"looking for some to take pity, but there was none, and for his comforters but he found none"¹⁴—might he not justly take up the confession—"I am a stranger in the earth?"

This verse exhibits the Christian in many most interesting points of view; distant from his proper home¹⁵—without a fixed residence¹⁶—with no particular interest in the world¹⁷—and submitting to all the inconveniences of a *stranger* on his journey homewards.¹⁸ Such is his state! And the word of God includes all that he wants—a guide, a guard, a companion—to direct, secure, and cheer his way. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.¹⁹ Most

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

² Rev. iii. 18.

³ Eph. i. 17.

⁴ John iii. 16.

⁵ Heb. x. 5-7.

⁶ Abraham, Gen. xxiii. 4. Jacob, Gen. xlvii. 9. David, Psalm xxxix. 12. All, Heb. xi. 13.

⁷ Job vii. 16.

⁸ Micah ii. 10.

⁹ Luke ii. 7.

¹⁰ Matt. viii. 20.

¹¹ Ib. xxi. 18.

¹² Luke viii. 3.

¹³ John i. 11.

¹⁴ Psalm lxix. 20.

¹⁵ Heb. xi. 9.

¹⁶ 1 Chron. xxix. 15.

¹⁷ Phil. iii. 20.

¹⁸ Acts xiv. 23. Heb. x. 34.

¹⁹ Prov. vi. 20-22.

suitable then is *the stranger's* prayer—"Hide not thy commandments from me." Acquaintance with the word of God supplies the place of friends and counsellors. It furnishes light, joy, strength, food, armor, and whatever else he may need on his way homewards.

The pilgrim-spirit is the pulse of the soul. All of us are travelling to eternity. The worldling is at home *in the earth*—a pilgrim only by constraint. His heart would say—"It is good for me to be here. Let God dispose of heaven at his pleasure. I am content to have my portion in this life."¹ The child of God is *a stranger in the earth*. Heaven is the country of his birth.² His kindred³—his inheritance⁴—his Saviour⁵—his hope⁶—his home⁷—is there. He is "a citizen of no mean city," of the heavenly Jerusalem.⁸ There he is a pilgrim in affection no less than in character. How cheering is the thought, that here we have no continuing city, if in heart and soul we are "seeking one to come!"⁹

We know indeed, that we cannot—we would not—call this world our home, and that it is far better to be without it, than to have our portion in it. But do we never feel at home *in the earth*, thus forgetting our proper character and our eternal prospects? Do we always live, speak, and act as "*strangers in the earth*"—in the midst of earthly enjoyments sitting loose to them, as if our treasure was in heaven? Does our conversation in the society of the world savor of the home whither we profess to be going? Is the world gaining ascendancy in our affections? Let the cross of Calvary be the object of our daily contemplation—the ground of our constant "glorying;" and the world will then be to us a "crucified" object.¹⁰ And lastly, let us not forget, that we are looking forward, and making progress towards a world, where none are strangers—where all are children of one family, dwelling in one eternal home. "*In my Father's house*"—said our gracious Head—"are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you."¹¹

20. *My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.*

THIS intense desire and affection is the Christian's answer to his prayers—*Open thou mine eyes—Hide not thy commandments from me*. For who that is conversant with this blessed revelation but longs to be filled with it? In contrasting this glow with the church of Laodicea, under a brighter dispensation "neither cold nor hot:"¹²—which state, we may ask, most nearly resembles our own? Observe also, not only the fervor, but the steady uniformity, of this religion. It was not a rapture, but a habit; constant and uniform; "*at all times*." With us, such enjoyments are too often favored seasons, happy moments; alas! only moments—why not days, and months, and years? The object of our desires is an in-

¹ Psalm xvii. 14. Compare Luke vi. 24; xii. 19, 20; xvi. 25.

² Gal. iv. 26.

³ Eph. iii. 15.

⁴ Ib. i. 3, 11, 6. Matt. xxv. 34.

⁵ John xiv. 3. Col. iii. 1

⁶ Phil. iii. 20.

⁷ 2 Cor. v. 1—6.

⁸ Heb. xii. 22.

⁹ Ib. xiii. 14.

¹⁰ Gal. vi. 14.

¹¹ John xiv. 2.

¹² Rev. iii. 15.

exhaustible spring. *The longing of the soul*, can never overreach its object. *The cherished desire* therefore will become the established habit—the element in which the child of God lives and thrives.

This uniformity is the most satisfactory test of our profession. Often are *the judgments* prized in affliction, when all other resources fail: or under a pang of conscience, when the terror of the Lord “is frowning upon the sinner.”¹ But the affection wears off the trouble, and the heart returns to its hardness. Often also the impulse of novelty gives a strong but temporary impression.² This is very different from the Christian, whose study is stretching out its desires *at all times*; finding *the judgments* a cordial or a discipline—a support or a preservation—as his need may require.

Not less important is this habit as the test of the soul’s prosperity. We are not satisfied with *occasional* intercourse with a beloved friend. His society is the life of our life. We seek him in his own ways, where he is used to resort. We feel the blank of his absence. We look out for his return with joyous anticipation. Now is this the picture of *our souls longing* for communion with Jesus? We may feel his loss, should the stated seasons of prayer fail in bringing him near to us. But do we *long* for him *at all times*? Do we “wait for him in the way of *his judgments*,” where he is wont to be found?³ And when spiritual exercises are exchanged for worldly occupations, do we seize the leisure moment to catch a word—a glimpse—a look? Is not the heart dumb with shame in the recollection of the cold habit of external or occasional duty?

But whence this low ebbing of spiritual desire? Do we live near to the throne of grace? Have we not neglected prayer for the influence of the Spirit? Have we not indulged a light, vain, and worldly spirit, than which nothing more tends to wither the growth of vital religion? Or have not the workings of unbelief been too faintly resisted? This of itself will account for much of our dulness; since the rule of the kingdom of grace is—“According to your faith be it unto you.”⁴ Grace is indeed an insatiable principle. Enjoyment, instead of surfeiting, only serves to sharpen the appetite. Yet if we are content to live at a low rate, there will be no sensible interest in the consolation of the Gospel. We know, desire, and are satisfied with little: and *therefore* we enjoy but little. We live as borderers on the land, instead of bearing our testimony—“Surely it floweth with milk and honey; *and this is the fruit of it.*”⁵ This is not the thriving, the cheerfulness, the adoring of the Gospel. It is rather the obscuring of the glory of our Christian profession, and of the happiness of its attendant privileges.

Let not the fervor of desire here expressed be conceived to be out of reach; nor let it be expected in the way of some sudden manifestation or excitement. Rather let us look for it in a patient, humble, and persevering waiting upon the Lord. We may

¹ Isa. xxvi. 16.

⁴ Matt. ix. 29.

² John v. 35.

⁵ Num. xiii. 27.

³ Isa. xxvi. 8; lxiv. 5.

have still to complain of coldness and wanderings. Yet strength to wait will be imperceptibly given: faith will be sustained for the conflict: and thus our souls will “make their boast in the Lord,” even though an excited flow of enjoyment should be withheld. One desire will, however, tread upon another, increasing in fulness, as the grand object is nearer our grasp.

At all events, let us beware of resting satisfied with the confession of our lukewarmness to our fellow-creatures, without “pouring out our heart before the Lord.” There is a fulness of grace in our glorious Head to “strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die,” as well as at the beginning to “quicken” us when “dead in trespasses and sins.” Abundant, also, are the promises and encouragements to poor, dry, barren souls—“I will heal their backslidings; I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.”¹ For what purpose are promises such as these given, but that they may be “arguments,” wherewith to “fill our mouth,” when in the contrition of faith we again venture to “order our cause before God?” And “will he plead against us with his great power?” No—but “he will put his strength in us;”² and we shall yet again “run the way of his commandments”³ with an enlarged heart.

21. *Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.*

Let the histories of Cain,⁴ Pharaoh,⁵ Haman,⁶ Nebuchadnezzar,⁷ and Herod,⁸ exhibit *the proud under the rebuke and curse of God*. He abhors their persons⁹ and their offerings;¹⁰ he “knows them afar off:”¹¹ “he resisteth them:”¹² “he scattereth them in the imaginations of their hearts.”¹³ Especially hateful are they in his sight, when, cloaking themselves under a spiritual garb—“they say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou: *these are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.*”¹⁴ Most of all is this sin an abomination in his own beloved people. David¹⁵ and Hezekiah¹⁶ are instructive beacons in the Church, that they, least of all, must expect to escape his rebuke—“Thou wast a God that forgavest them; *though thou tookest vengeance on their inventions.*”¹⁷ “Now they call *the proud* happy.”¹⁸ But will they be counted so, when they shall be manifestly under *the curse of God*; when “the day of the Lord shall be upon them to bring them low,” yea to “burn them in the oven” of his heavenly wrath?¹⁹

Pride probably influences all, that “*do err from the Lord’s commandments*,” yet doubtless “the Righteous Judge” will make an infinite difference between *errors* of infirmity and of obstinate wil-

¹ Hosea xiv. 4—6.

² Job xxiii. 4—6.

³ Verse 32.

⁴ Gen. iv. 5, 13—16.

⁵ Exod. xiv. 15—31.

⁶ Esther vii. 7—10.

⁷ Dan. iv. 29—33.

⁸ Acts xii. 21—23.

⁹ Prov. vi. 16, 17.

¹⁰ Luke xviii. 11, 12, 14.

¹¹ Psalm cxxxviii. 6.

¹² 1 Peter v. 5, with Prov. iii. 34.

¹³ Luke i. 51.

¹⁴ Isa. lxxv. 5, with Luke xviii. 11.

¹⁵ 2 Sam. xxiv. 1—15.

¹⁶ 2 Kings xx. 12—18; 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

¹⁷ Psalm xcix. 8.

¹⁸ Mal. iii. 15.

¹⁹ Isaiah ii. 12—17; Mal. iv. 1.

fulness.¹ The confession of the man of God—"I have gone astray like a lost sheep"²—is widely different in character from the subjects of this awful *rebuke and curse*. "*Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes; for their deceit is falsehood.*"³

We wonder not at this expression of the mind of God concerning pride. There is no sin more abhorrent to his character. It is as if we were taking the crown from his head, and placing it upon our own. It is man making a god of himself,—acting from himself, and for himself. Nor is this principle less destructive to our own happiness. And yet it is not only rooted, but it often rears its head and blossoms, and bears fruit, even in hearts which "hate and abhor" its influence. It is most like its father, the Devil, in serpentine deceitfulness. It is always active—always ready imperceptibly to mix itself up with everything. When it is mortified in one shape, it rises in another. When we have thought that it was gone, in some unexpected moment we find it here still. It can convert everything into nourishment, even God's choicest gifts—yea, the graces of his Spirit. Let no saint therefore, however near he may be living to God, however favored with the shinings of his countenance—consider himself beyond the reach of this temptation. Paul was most in danger, when he seemed to be most out of it; and nothing but an instant miracle of grace and power saved him from the "snare of the Devil."⁴ Indeed, the whole plan of salvation is intended to humble the pride of man, by exhibiting his restoration to the Divine favor, as a free gift through the atoning blood of the cross. How hateful therefore is *proud* man's resistance to this humbling doctrine of the cross, and the humbling requisitions of the life of faith flowing from it! This makes the sure "foundation" of the believer's hope "a stone of stumbling" to the unbeliever's ruin.⁵ As regards also the means of salvation—how can pride lift up its head in the view of the Son of God, "taking upon him the form of a servant," that he might bear the curse of man?⁶ "Behold, the soul that is lifted up is not upright in him."⁷

But can a sinner—can a saint—be *proud*?—one that owes everything to free and sovereign grace—one that has wasted so much time—abused so much mercy—so grieved the Spirit of God—that has a heart so full of atheism—unbelief—selfishness? Nay, the very pride itself should be the matter of the deepest daily humiliation. Thus the remembrance of it may, under Divine grace, prove an effectual means of subduing it in our hearts. We shall overcome corruption by its own workings, and meet our adversary with his own weapons. And if this cursed principle be not wholly destroyed, yet the very sight of its corruption, deepening our contrition, will be overruled for our spiritual advancement.

O blessed end! intended by the Lord's dealings with us, to "humble and to prove us"—"to know," and to make us know "what

¹ Psalm xix. 12, with xcv. 10.

² Verse 176.

³ Verse 118.

⁴ See 2 Cor. xii. 7

⁵ Rom. ix. 32, 33. 1 Peter ii. 7, 8.

⁶ Phil. ii. 5—8.

⁷ Hab. ii. 4.

was in our heart, that he might do us good at the latter end!"¹ Let us not frustrate his gracious intentions, or build again the things, which he would have destroyed. May we love to lie low—lower than ever—infinately low before him! Lord! teach us to remember, that "that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in thy sight."² Teach us to bless thee for even thy sharp and painful discipline, which tends to subjugate this hateful pride of our hearts before our Saviour's cross!

22. *Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.*

THE *proud under the rebuke of God*, are usually distinguished by their enmity to his people. They delight to pour upon them "*reproach and contempt*," with no other provocation given, than that their *keeping the testimonies* of God condemns their own neglect.³ This must, however, be counted as the cost of a decided and separate, and consistent profession. Yet it is such a portion, as Moses valued above all the treasures of the world:⁴ it is that *reproach*, which our Master himself "despised," as "reckoning it not worthy to be compared with" "the joy that was set before him."⁵ For did he bear his cross only on the way to Calvary? It was laid for every step in his path: it met him in every form of suffering, of "*reproach and contempt*." Look then at him, as taking up his daily cross in breathing the atmosphere of a world of sin, and "enduring the contradiction of sinners against himself."⁶ Mark him consummating his course of "*reproach and contempt*," by suffering without the gate—and can we hesitate to "go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach?"⁷

The trial, however, especially if cast upon us by those whom we have loved and valued, or by those whom we wish to love and value us, proves most severe: and the spreading our case, after David's example, before the Lord, is the only preservation from faintness—"Remove from me reproach and contempt."

Perhaps "*contempt*" is more hard to bear than "*reproach*." Even our enemies think of us so much better than we deserve, that it strikes with peculiar poignancy. Yet when the submissive prayer of deprecation⁸ is sent up, doubtless some answer, and *that* the right answer, will be given; and whether the "*reproach*" be removed, or "grace" vouchsafed "sufficient" to endure it,⁹ the issue will prove alike for the glory of God, and the prosperity of our own souls.

But let us beware of that "way of escape" in returning to the world, which the insincere are ever ready to pursue. They dare not act to the full conviction of their consciences: they dare not confront their friends with the avowal of their full determination to form their conduct by the principles of the word of God. This is hard—this is impossible. They know not the "victory that overcometh the world:"¹⁰ and therefore cannot bear this mark upon their

¹ Deut. viii. 2, 16.

⁵ Ib. xii. 2.

⁹ 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

² Luke xvi. 15.

⁶ Ib. 3.

¹⁰ See 1 John v. 4, 5.

³ Heb. xi. 7.

⁷ Ib. xiii. 12, 13.

⁴ Ib. 24—26.

⁸ See verse 134.

foreheads—"These are they, which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."¹ Far better, however, will be the heaviest weight of "*reproach and contempt*," than any such endeavor to *remove it* from ourselves. The desire to escape the cross, convicts the heart of unfaithfulness, and makes way for tenfold difficulties in our path. Every worldly compliance against the voice of God is a step into the by-path, which deviates wider and wider from the straight and narrow way, brings discredit upon our profession, proves a stumbling-block in the way of the weak, and will cause us, if not actually to come short, at least to "*seem to come short* of the promised rest."²

But is the weight of the cross really "above that we are able to bear?" He that bore it for us will surely enable us to endure it for him: and upheld by him, we cannot sink. It is a sweet exchange, by which the burden of sin is removed, and bound to his cross; and what remains to us is the lighter cross of "*reproach and contempt*,"—the badge of our discipleship.³ If then we have the testimony of our consciences, that in the midst of a persecuting world, we "*have kept his testimonies*,"⁴—here is our evidence of adoption, of our Father's special love, of the indwelling, comforting, supporting Spirit.⁵ Here then is our warrant of hope, that the overwhelming weight will be *removed from us*; and that we shall be able to testify to our Master's praise in the churches of God, that "his yoke is easy, and his burden is light."⁶

23. *Princes also did sit and speak against me; but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.*

DAVID might well give his testimony to "the words of the Lord," that they were "tried words:"⁷ for perhaps no one had ever tried them more than himself; and certainly no one had more experience of their faithfulness, sweetness, and support. Saul and his "*princes might indeed sit and speak against him*," but he had a resource, of which they could never deprive him—"Not as the world giveth, give I unto you."⁸ As our blessed Master was employed in communion with his Father, and delighting in his work at the time, when the "*princes did sit and speak against him*,"⁹ so under similar circumstances of trial, this faithful servant of God, by *meditation in the Lord's statutes*, extracted spiritual food for his support:¹⁰ and in this strength of his God he was enabled to "suffer according to his will, and to commit the keeping of his soul to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator."¹¹

The children of Israel in Egypt;¹² Daniel in Babylon;¹³ and the disciples of Christ in the early ages of the church,¹⁴ have severely found "this same affliction to be accomplished in themselves." God is pleased to permit it, to show that "his kingdom is not of this world,"¹⁵ to wean his people from earthly dependencies—and to

¹ Rev. xiv. 4.

² Heb. iv. 1.

³ Matt. xvi. 24.

⁴ Verses 61, 69, 87, 95, 110.

⁵ John xiv. 15—18, 21—23.

⁶ Matt. xi. 30.

⁷ Ps. xii. 7, Prayer-book Translation.

⁸ John xiv. 27.

⁹ Ib. xi. 47, 54—57.

¹⁰ Comp. Psalm xciv. 19—22.

¹¹ 1 Peter iv. 19.

¹² Exodus i. 10.

¹³ Dan. vi. 4—6.

¹⁴ Matt. x. 17, 18.

Acts iv. 27—29.

¹⁵ John xviii. 36.

bring out before the world a more full testimony of his name.¹ One other reason is suggested by this verse—to make his word more precious by the experience of its sustaining consolation in the conflict with the power of the world. Often indeed, from a want of a present application of the word, young Christians especially, are in danger of being put to rebuke by the scorner's sneer. The habit of Scriptural *meditation* will realize to them a present God, speaking "words of spirit and life" to their souls. The importance therefore of an accurate and well-digested acquaintance with this precious book cannot be too highly estimated. In the Christian's conflict it is "the sword of the Spirit,"² which, if it be kept bright by constant use, will never be wielded without the victory of faith. Such powerful support does it give against fainting under persecution, that the good soldier may ever be ready to "thank God, and to take courage."³ Christ has left it indeed as the portion of his people—"In the world ye shall have tribulation;" counterbalanced however, most abundantly, by the portion which they enjoy in him—"In me ye shall have peace."⁴ If therefore the one half of this portion may seem hard, the legacy entire is such, as no servant of Christ can refuse to accept, or indeed will receive without thankfulness.

24. *Thy testimonies also are my delight, and my counsellors.*

WHAT could we want more in a time of difficulty than comfort and direction? David had both these blessings. As the fruit of his "*meditation in the Lord's statutes*," in his distress they were his "*delight*;" in his perplexity they were his "*counsellors*." He would not have exchanged his *delight* for the best joys of earth.⁵ And so wisely did his counsellors direct his course, that, though "*princes sat and spake against him*," they "could find none occasion nor fault."⁶ The testimonies of God were truly "*the men of his counsel*."⁷ He guided his own conduct by the rules laid before him in the book of God, as if he were having recourse to the most experienced counsellors, or rather as if the prophets of his God were giving the word from his mouth.⁸ Thus the subjects as well as the Sovereign, had his counsel. On one side was Saul and his counsellors⁹—on the other side, David and the *testimonies of his God*. Which, think we, was better furnished with that "wisdom which is profitable to direct?" Subsequently, as a king, David was constrained to make "*the testimonies of his God his counsellors*"¹⁰; and probably, to his constant regard to their voice he owed much of his earthly prosperity.¹¹

In such a dark world as this, beset with temptation at every turn,

¹ Matt. x. 18.

² Eph. vi. 17.

³ Acts xxviii. 15.

⁴ John xvi. 33. See the beautiful illustration of this *whole declaration*—Acts xvi. 22—25.

⁵ Verses 14, 97, 103, 127, with Psalm iv. 7.

⁶ 1 Sam. xviii. 14. Psalm ci. 2, with Dan. vi. 4, 5.

⁷ Margin.

⁸ Comp. 2 Sam. vii. 4, 5; also xvi. 23.

⁹ Verse 23.

¹⁰ Deut. xvii. 18—20.

¹¹ 2 Sam. viii. 6, 14. Compare also his dying and most encouraging advice to Solomon on this subject, founded doubtless upon the recollection of his own experience, 1 Kings ii. 3.

we pre-eminently need sound and wise counsel. But all of us carry an evil *counsellor* within us, and it is our folly to listen to the voice.¹ God has given us his word as a sure *counsellor*, and "he that hearkeneth to its counsel is wise."²

Now, do we value the privilege of this heavenly counsel? Every improvement must increase our *delight* in it; a heartless interest shuts out this blessing. But those who make *the word their delight* will always find it *their counsellor*. Yet a mere cursory reading will never realize to us its holy delight or counsel. It must be brought home to our own experience, and consulted on those trivial occasions of every day, when, unconscious of our need of divine direction, we are too often inclined to lean to our own counsel. The Christian is a man of faith every step of his way. And this habitual use and daily familiarity with *the testimonies of God* will show him the pillar and the cloud³ in all the dark turns of his heavenly road. The word will be to him as the "Urim and Thummim:"⁴ an infallible *counsellor*.

Sometimes, however, perplexity arises from the conflict, not between conscience and sinful indulgence, (in which case Christian sincerity would always determine the path,) but between duty and duty. When, however, acknowledged obligations seem to interfere with each other, the counsel of the word will mark their relative importance, connection, and dependence: the present path in providence: the guidance, which has been vouchsafed to the Lord's people in similar emergencies; and the light which the daily life of our Great Exemplar exhibits before us. The great concern, however, is to cultivate the habit of mind, which falls in most naturally with the counsel of the word. "Walking in the fear of the Lord,"⁵ in a simple spirit of dependence,⁶ and torn away from the idolatry of taking counsel from our own hearts, we cannot *materially* err; because there is *here a suitableness between the disposition and the promise*—a watchfulness against the impetuous bias of the flesh: a paramount regard to the glory of God, and a meek submission to his gracious appointment. If the counsel, however, should not prove infallible, the fault is not in the word, but in the indistinctness of our own perception. We want not a clearer rule, or a surer guide, but a more single eye. And if, after all, it may not mark every precise act of duty (for to do this, "even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written,") yet it determines the standard, to which the most minute acting of the mind should be brought;⁷ and the disposition, which will reflect the light of the will of God upon our path.⁸

But let it be remembered, that any want of sincerity in the heart⁹—any allowance of self-dependence¹⁰—will always close the avenues of this Divine light and counsel. We are often unconsci-

¹ Prov. xxviii. 26.

² Ib. xii. 15.

³ Numbers ix. 15—23.

⁵ Ib. xxvii. 21.

⁶ See Psalm xxv. 12, 14.

⁶ Ib. xxv. 4, 5, 9; cxliiii. 8.

⁷ 1 Cor. x. 31. Col. iii. 17.

⁸ Matt. vi. 22, 23.

⁹ 1 Sam. xxviii. 6. Ezek. xiv. 2—4.

¹⁰ Prov. iii. 5, 6.

ously "walking in the light of our own fire, and in the sparks that we have kindled."¹ Perhaps we sought, as we conceived, the guidance of the Lord's counsel, and suppose that we are walking in it. But, in the act of seeking, and as the preparation for seeking, did we subject our motives and inclinations to a strict, cautious, self-suspecting scrutiny? Was the heart schooled to the discipline of the cross? Was "every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ?"² Or was not our heart possessed with the object, before counsel was sought at the mouth of God?³ Oh! how careful should we be to walk warily in those uncertain marks of heavenly counsel, that fall in with the bias of our own inclination! How many false steps in the record of past experience may be traced to the counsel of our own hearts, sought and followed to the neglect of the counsel of God;⁴ while no circumstance of perplexity can befall us in the spirit of humility, simplicity, and sanctity, when the counsel of the Lord will fail!

An undue dependence upon human counsel,⁵ whether of the living or the dead, greatly hinders the full influence of the counsel of the word. However valuable such counsel may be, and however closely it may agree with the word, we must not forget, that it is not the word—that it is fallible—and therefore must never be resorted to in the first place, or followed with that full reliance, which we are warranted to place on the revelation of God. On the other hand, what is it to have God's word as our "*Counsellor*?" Is it not to have himself—"the only wise God?" When our Bibles, in seasons of difficulty, are searched in a humble, prayerful teachable spirit, we are as much depending upon the Lord himself for counsel, as if we were listening to an immediate revelation from heaven. We want not a new revelation, or a sensible voice from above, for every fresh emergency. It is enough, that our Father has given us this blessed "word as a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path."⁶

Let me then inquire what is the counsel of God, that speaks directly to myself? If I am an unawakened sinner, it warns me to turn from sin⁷—it invites me to the Saviour⁸—it directs me to wait upon God.⁹ If I am a professor, slumbering in the form of godliness, it shows me my real condition¹⁰—it instructs me in the all-sufficiency of Christ,¹¹ and cautions me of the danger of hypocrisy.¹² If through grace I am made a child of God, still do I need my Father's counsel to recover me from perpetual backsliding¹³—to excite me to increased watchfulness,¹⁴ and to strengthen my confidence in the fulness of his grace,¹⁵ and the faithfulness of his love.¹⁶ Ever shall I have reason for the grateful acknowledgment—"I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel."¹⁷ And every step of

¹ Isaiah i. 11.² 2. Cor. x. 5.³ Jer. xlii.⁴ Josh. ix. 14. Isa. xxx. 1—3.⁵ Isa. ii. 22.⁶ Verse 105. Comp. Prov. vi. 23.⁷ Prov. i. 24—31. Ezek. xxxiii. 11.⁸ Rev. iii. 17.⁹ Isa. lv. 1. John vii. 37.⁹ Hosea xii. 6.¹¹ Ib. 18.¹² Luke xii. 1.¹³ Jer. iii. 12, 13.¹⁴ 1 Thess. v. 6. Rev. iii. 2.¹⁵ Isaiah xxvi. 4.¹⁶ Heb. xii. 5, 6.¹⁷ Psalm xvi. 7.

my way would I advance, glorifying my God and Father by confiding in his counsel unto the end—"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."¹

PART IV.

25. *My soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken thou me according to thy word.*

SIN is no trifle to a child of God. It is his heaviest sorrow. Thus David—thus the great Apostle—found it.² And where is the believer, who has not full sympathy with their complaints? To have a *soul cleaving to the dust*, and not to feel the trouble, is the black mark of a sinner, dead in sins—dead to God. To "know the plague of our own heart,"³ to feel our misery, to believe and to apply the remedy,⁴ is the satisfactory evidence of a child of God. *Dust* is the portion of the world: and they wish for no better. But that the soul of the man of God should continually *cleave to the dust*, is most strange and humbling. And yet such is the influence of his evil nature—such the power of self-will and self-indulgence—such the regard to human praise, and cherishing of self-admiration, that were it not that he "abhors himself" for the very *dust that cleaves* to him, he would question the existence of a renewing change. He knows what he ought to be. He has tasted the blessedness of "mounting upward on eagles' wings."⁵ But every attempt to rise is hindered by the clogging weight that keeps him down. It is however the *cleaving of his soul* that is so painful,—not occasional, but constant—not like the bird of the morning that descends for a moment, and then soars his upward flight; but it seems as if, like the "serpent—dust was to be his meat;"⁶ as if the spiritual, heaven-born soul was to sink and grovel below. And then, as the dust of the summer-road blinds the eye, and obscures the prospect; how does this earthliness of soul darken the view of the Saviour, dim the eye of faith, and hide the glorious prospects, which, when beheld in the clear horizon, enliven the weary pilgrim on his way!

But this complaint is the language of conflict and humiliation—not of despondency—Mark the believer carrying it to the Lord—"Here I lie in the *dust*, without life or power. Oh! thou Saviour, who "camest that I might have life, and that I might have it more abundantly"⁷—*Quicken me*. Breathe upon me thine own life, that I may rise from the *dust*, and *cleave* to thee." This cry for

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 24.

² Ib. xxxviii. 4. Rom. vii. 24.

³ 1 Kings viii. 38.

⁴ Rom. vii. 24, 25.

⁵ Isa. xl. 31.

⁶ Ibid lxx. 25.

⁷ John x. 10.

quickenings grace is the exercise of faith. We have a covenant to plead. Faith is the hand, that takes hold of the promise—"according to thy word." Can this word fail? "Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or one tittle pass" from the engagements of a covenant-keeping God. "He is faithful that hath promised."¹ The man who takes hold of this plea, is "a prince who has power with God, and prevails."²

But how different is the character of the mere professor! ready probably to make the same confession, yet without humiliation, without prayer, without faith. Nothing is more common than to hear the complaint—"My soul cleaveth unto the dust." The world has such power over us—we are so cold—so dead to spiritual things; while perhaps the complaint is never once brought with wrestling supplication, but rather urged in indolent self-complacency, as an evidence of the good state of the heart before God. Yet it is not the complaint of sickness, but an application to the physician, that advances the recovery of the patient. We do not usually expect to better our condition, by mourning over its badness, or merely wishing for its improvement. Nor is it the confession of sin, but the application to the Great Physician that marks genuine contrition before God. That confession, which evaporates in heartless complaints, belongs not to the tenderness of a renewed heart. But the utterance of genuine prayer is the voice of God's own "Spirit making intercession for us;" and then indeed how cheering the encouragement, that he "that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God!"³ Some are ready to give up or delay their duty, when they have been unable to bring their heart to it. Thus does 'Satan get advantage of us' by our 'ignorance of his devices.' *Quickening* grace is not the ground or warrant for duty. Indisposition to duty is not our weakness, but our sin—not therefore to be indulged, but resisted. We must mourn over the dulness that hinders us, and diligently wait for the 'help we every moment need.' God keeps the grace in his own hands, and gives it at his pleasure, to exercise our daily dependence upon him.⁴ The acting of grace strengthens the habit. Praying helps to pray. If the door is closed, "Knock, and it shall be opened."⁵ Assuredly it will not long be shut to him, who has faith and patience to wait until it be opened.

Now let me sift the character of my profession. Is it an habitual, persevering, overcoming conflict with sin? Do I not sometimes indulge in fruitless bemoanings of my state, when I had far better be exercising myself in vigorous actings of grace? If I find "*my soul cleaving to the dust,*" am I not sometimes "lying on my face,"⁶ when I ought to be "taking heaven by violence,"⁷ by importunate petitions for *quickenings* grace? Are my prayers invigorated by confidence in the word of God? Oh! let me remember that "they

¹ Heb. x. 23, with Luke xxi. 33.

⁴ Phil. ii. 12, 13.

⁵ Matt. vii. 7, 8.

² Gen. xxxiii. 28.

⁶ Josh. vii. 10.

³ Rom viii. 26, 27.

⁷ Matt. xi. 12.

that wait upon the Lord," shall shake off *the dust* to which they have *cleaved* so long, and "shall mount with wings like eagles,"¹ to take possession of their heavenly home.

O Lord! make me more deeply ashamed, that "*my soul should cleave to the dust.*" Breathe upon me fresh influence from thy *quickenings* Spirit. Help me to plead thy word of promise; and oh! may every fresh view of my sinfulness, while it prostrates me in self-abasement before thee, be overruled to make the Saviour daily and hourly more precious to my soul. For, defiled as I am in myself, in every service of my heart, what but the unceasing application of his blood, and the uninterrupted prevalence of his intercession, gives me a moment's confidence before thee, or prevents the very sins that mingle with my prayers from sealing my condemnation? Blessed Saviour! it is nothing but thy everlasting merit, covering my person, and honoring my sacrifice, that satisfies the justice of an offended God, and restrains it from breaking forth as a devouring fire, to consume me upon my very knees!

26. *I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me; teach me thy statutes.*

A BEAUTIFUL description of the "simplicity and godly sincerity" of the believer's "walk with God!" He spreads his whole case before his God, "*declaring his ways*" of sinfulness,² of difficulty,³ and of conduct.⁴ And indeed it is our privilege to acquaint our Father with all our care and need; that we may be pitied by his love, and guided by his counsel, and confirmed by his strength. Who would not find relief by unbosoming himself to his Father? This showing of ourselves to God—*declaring our ways* of sin before him without guile—is the short and sure way of rest. "*Thou heardest me.*" "*When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.*"⁵ While the voice of ingenuous confession was suppressed, cries and lamentations were disregarded. It was not the voice of the penitent child! and therefore "where was the sounding of his father's bowels, and of his mercies towards him?"⁶ But now, on the first utterance of confession from his lips, or rather on the first purpose of contrition formed in his heart; "while he is yet speaking,"⁷ the full and free pardon, which had been signed in heaven, comes down with royal parental love to his soul—"I said, I will confess my transgression unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."⁸ Oh! what cannot he testify of the more than parental tenderness, with which "his transgression is forgiven, and his sin covered!"⁹ And yet how necessary to the free *declaration of our ways* is an acquaintance with the way of forgiveness! Had not our great "High Priest passed into the heavens," how awful would have been the thought, that "all things were naked and opened unto the eyes of him, with whom

¹ Isaiah xl. 31.

² Psalm li. 3.

³ Ib. v. 8; xxvii. 11.

⁴ Ib. cxliii. 8, 10; lxix. 5.

⁵ Ib. xxxii. 3.

⁶ Isaiah lxiii. 15.

⁷ Dan. ix. 20.

⁸ Psalm xxxii. 5.

² Sam. xii. 13.

Comp. Jer. iii. 12, 13.

⁹ Compare Psalm xxxii. 1.

Luke xv. 18—22. Prov. xxviii. 13.

we have to do!" We could only then have "covered our transgressions as Adam, by hiding our iniquity in our bosom."¹ But now, even though "*our ways*" are so defiled, so crooked, that we cannot but "abhor ourselves," on account of them, we are yet encouraged "boldly" to "*declare*" them all before God, with the assurance of finding present acceptance, and seasonable grace.²

And now, having found the happy fruit of this sincere and child-like spirit, then follows the obligation of walking worthy of this mercy.³ Hence our need of the prayer for continual *teaching*. The same heavenly guidance, that brought us into the way of return, we need for every successive step to the end—"Teach me thy way, O Lord: I will walk in thy truth."⁴ "*I have declared my*" ignorance, my sinfulness, and my whole experience before thee, looking for thy pardoning mercy, thy teaching Spirit, and assisting grace—"And thou hast heard me." O continue to me what thou has been, and *teach me* more of thyself!

The hypocrite may pray after his manner. But he never thus opens his heart, and *declares his ways* before his God. And are we sincere in our dealings with him? How often do we treat our Almighty friend as if we were weary of dealing with him! And even when we do "*declare our ways*" before him, are we not often content to leave the result as a matter of uncertainty? We do not watch for the answer to our prayer. It will come in the diligent exercise of faith, but not perhaps in our way. We may have asked for temporal blessings, and we receive spiritual.⁵ We may have "besought" deliverance from trial, and we receive "grace sufficient" to bear it.⁶ But this is the Lord's wise and gracious answer—"Thou *heardest me*. And how sweet are those mercies, which come to us manifestly marked with this inscription—"Received by prayer!" They are such encouragement to pray again.⁷ It is not our inevitable weakness,⁸ nor our lamented dulness,⁹ nor our abhorred wanderings,¹⁰ nor our opposed distractions,¹¹ nor our mistaken unbelief;¹² it is not any—no—nor all these—that can shut out our prayer. If "iniquity" is not "regarded in our heart," we may always hear our Saviour's voice—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."¹³

¹ Job xxxi. 33.

² Heb. iv. 13—16.

³ Psalm lxxxv. 8.

⁴ Ib. lxxxvi. 11.

⁵ Matt. ix. 2.

⁶ 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

⁷ Psalm cxvi. 1, 2.

⁸ Rom. vii. 21.

⁹ Mark xiv. 38, 40.

¹⁰ Verse 113.

¹¹ Psalm lxxxvi. 11, last clause.

¹² Mark ix. 22, 24.

¹³ John xvi. 23, 24. Every way worthy of that great man, and a most instructive illustration of Christian sincerity, was the resolution of President Edwards: "Resolved to exercise myself in this all my life long, viz., with the greatest openness to *declare my ways to God*, and lay open my soul to him—all my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, fears, hopes, desires, and everything, and every circumstance, according to Dr. Manton's twenty-seventh sermon on the cxix. Psalm." Resol. 65. Extracted from his *Diary Works*, vol. i. 16.

27. *Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.*

MARK the reiterated cries of the man of God for heavenly light—*Teach me thy statutes—make me to understand the way of thy precepts.* The need and the encouragement for these cries is equally manifest. Who has ever been known to *understand the way* of himself? And to whom—walking in a well-ordered conversation—has the Lord ever failed to show it? A man, untaught by the Spirit of God, may be able to criticise and even clearly to expound much of the word of God. But such a prayer as this has never ascended from his heart; the necessity of it has never been felt. And doubtless from this neglect of prayer have arisen those floating fancies and false and unscriptural doctrines, which crude, unexercised minds have too hastily embraced. Instead of humbly and simply asking—“*Make me to understand*”—men too often “lean to their understanding,” and are “vainly puffed up” by their fleshly mind, “*not holding the Head.*”² Such men may obtain loose fragments of spiritual knowledge. But they will not be in the faith “grounded and settled.”³ They never know when they are upon safe ground; and being “unlearned and unstable, they wrest the Scriptures”—except the sovereign grace of God interpose—“unto their own destruction.”⁴

Never must we forget, that teaching from above is indispensable to a right knowledge of the most simple truths. Ignorance and prejudice pervert the understanding. “Spiritual things can only be spiritually discerned.”⁵ Divine doctrines can only be apprehended by Divine light.⁶ But under heavenly teaching, the deeper and more mysterious truths (so far as they are needful to be understood) are manifested with the same clearness, as the more elementary doctrines—“Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit. Now we have received—not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.”⁷ Wondrous indeed is the spiritual revelation in the knowledge of himself; including “the hope of his calling—the riches of the glory of his inheritance in his saints—the exceeding greatness of his power” manifested to, and wrought in, his people—no other or less than that “which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.”⁸ In the understanding of the way, we would be progressing, until the new man “grows up unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”⁹ The smallest attainment in this knowledge is (as the great day will fully declare) of infinitely greater value than the highest intelligence in the field of earthly science.

But how important is it to grow in this knowledge!¹⁰ Theoreti-

¹ See Psalm 1. 23.

⁶ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

⁸ Eph. i. 17—20.

² Col. ii. 18, 19.

⁶ Psalm xxxvi. 9.

⁸ Ib. iv. 13.

⁸ Ib. i. 24.

⁷ 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10, 12.

¹⁰ 2 Peter iii. 18.

⁴ 2 Peter iii. 16.

cal attainment is at a stand. Spiritual and practical knowledge is always advancing. Little, indeed, comparatively, is necessary for salvation. But much for comfort and steadfastness—much also for the clear discernment of that narrow *way of the precepts* so difficult to trace, and when traced so difficult to maintain. Not less important is it to keep the object in constant view. Why do I desire to *understand that way?* That I may commend it to others—that I may *talk of thy wondrous works*. Abhorred be the thought of indulging in a self-complacent view of my attainments! But oh! let my God be more admired by me, and glorified in me.¹ And may I advance both myself and others in his obedience and praise!

Often do we complain of restraint in religious conversation. But the prayer—*Make me to understand while I talk*—will bring “a live coal to our lips” from the altar of God—“Our mouths will then speak out of the abundance of the heart,”² and “minister grace to the hearers.”³ Humility, teachableness, simplicity, will bring light into the understanding, influence the heart, “open the lips,” and unite our every member that we have in the service and praise of God.

28. *My soul melteth for heaviness; strengthen thou me according unto thy word.*

Is this David “whose heart is as the heart of a lion, utterly melting?”⁴ But the sorrows, as the joys of the spiritual hope—dealing immediately with the Infinite and Eternal God—are beyond conception.⁵ Ordinary courage may support under the trials of this life; but when “the arrows of the Almighty are within us, the poison thereof drinketh up our spirit.”⁶ How then can the Christian’s lot be so enviable—when *their souls thus melt for heaviness?* But this—be it remembered—is only “for a season.” There is a “needs be” for it, while it remains: and in the end it will “be found unto praise, and honor, and glory.”⁷ Never perhaps are their graces more lively, or the ground of their assurance more clear, than in these seasons of sorrow. They complain, indeed, of the diversified power of indwelling sin. But their very complaints are the evidence of the mighty working of indwelling grace. For what is it but the principle of faith, that makes unbelief their burden? What but hope, that struggles with their tears? What but love, that makes their coldness a grief? What but humility, that causes them to loathe their pride? What but the secret spring of thankfulness, that shows them their unthankfulness, and shames them for it? And therefore the very depth of “that *heaviness which melts their souls*” away, is the exhibition of the strength of God’s work within, upholding them in perseverance of conflict to the end. Would not the believer then, when eyeing in his heaviest moments the most prosperous condition of the ungodly, say—“Let me not eat of their dainties?”⁸ Far better,

¹ Gal. i. 24. Matt. v. 16.

² Matt. xii. 34.

³ Eph. iv. 29.

⁴ 2 Sam. xvii. 10. Comp. Josh. vii. 5. Ps. cvii. 26.

⁵ See Job xxxiv. 29.

⁶ Job vi. 4. Comp. Prov. xviii. 14.

⁷ 1 Peter i. 6, 7. Comp. Ps. xxx. 5.

⁸ Psalm cxli. 4.

and, we may add, far happier, is godly sorrow than worldly joy. In the midst of his misery, the Christian would not exchange his hope in the Gospel—though often obscured by unbelief, and clouded by fear—for “all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.” “If the heart knoweth his own bitterness, a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.”¹ Yet the bitterness is keenly felt. Sin displeases a tender and gracious Father.² It has “pierced” the heart that loves him,³ and shed the blood that saves him. It “grieves”⁴ the indwelling Comforter of his soul. God expects to see him a mourner; and he feels he has reason enough to mourn—“*My soul melteth for heaviness.*”

But this cry of distress is sometimes the child under his Father’s needful chastisement. The world is dethroned, but not extirpated in the heart. Much dross is yet to be removed. The sources of the too attractive earthly joy must be embittered: and now it is that the discipline of the cross forces the cry—“*my soul melteth for heaviness.*” Yet in the midst of heaviness, the child of God cannot forget that he is loved—that he is saved; and the recollection of this sovereign mercy makes his tears of godly sorrow, tears of joy.

But this *melting heaviness* has not wrought its work, until it has bowed us before the throne of grace with the pleading cry of faith—*strengthen thou me*. For do we stand by the strength of our own resolutions or habits of grace? Unless the Lord renew his supply from moment to moment, all is frail and withering. But what burden or difficulty is too great for Almighty strength? “Fear not, thou worm Jacob; thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small.”⁵ And especially in our success, when the plea is drawn, as it is repeatedly in this Psalm⁶—*according to thy word.* For what does that word assure us?—“As thy days, so shall thy strength be.”⁷ “Will he plead against me?”—said Job—“with his great power? No; but he will put strength in me.”⁸ Thus David found it in his own case: “In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.”⁹ Thus also to the apostle was the promise given and fulfilled: “My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”¹⁰ And is not “the God of Israel” still “he that giveth strength and power unto his people;”¹¹ still the same “faithful God, who will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it?”¹²

When we are most sensible of our utter helplessness, and most simple in our reliance upon Divine strength, then it is, that the

¹ Prov. xiv. 10. “A good man lying on his bed of sickness, and being asked—which were the most comfortable days that he ever knew? cried out—O give me my *mourning* days; give me my *mourning* days again, for they were the joyfullest days that ever I had.”—*Brooke’s Works.*

² Psalm li. 4.

³ Zech. xii. 10.

⁴ Eph. iv. 20.

⁵ Isa. xli. 14, 15.

⁶ Verses 25, 41, 58, &c.

⁷ Deut. xxxiii. 25.

⁸ Job xxiii. 6.

⁹ Ps. cxxxviii. 3.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

¹¹ Ps. lxxviii. 35.

¹² 1 Cor. x. 13.

"soul, melting for heaviness," is most especially upheld and established. "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad."¹ And how reviving is that "good word" of the Gospel, which proclaims the Saviour, anointed to "give the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness,"² and gifted with "the tongue of the learned, that he might know how to speak a word in season unto him that is weary!"³ And no less encouraging is it to view Him "melting for heaviness"⁴—"sore amazed and very heavy"—under the accumulated weight of imputed guilt; learning by this bitter discipline, "in that he himself suffered being tempted, to succor them that are tempted."⁵ Yet was he, like his faithful servant, *strengthened according to his Father's word*, in the moment of his bitterest agony, by the agency of his own creation.⁶ And this faithful support, vouchsafed to the Head, is the seal and pledge of what every member in every trouble will most assuredly enjoy. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in his people, so their consolation also aboundeth by Christ."⁷ The blessed word will supply all their need—life for their quickening, light for their direction, comfort for their enjoyment, strength for their support—"Strengthen thou me according unto thy word."

Lord, may I ever be kept from despondency—regarding it as sinful in itself, dishonorable to thy name, and weakening to my soul; and though I must "needs be sometime in heaviness through manifold temptations," yet let the power of faith be in constant exercise, that I may be able to expostulate with my soul—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."⁸

29. *Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.*

EVERY deviation in principle and conduct from the strait and narrow path, is a *way of lying*. Every traveller in the *way*, "feedeth on the ashes" of his own delusion. Does it seem a marvel that the man of God should deprecate so earnestly the influence of gross sin? "The brand plucked out of the fire" retains a susceptibility of the fire. The oldest Christian in the family of God might at any moment of unwatchfulness be captivated by the chain of his former sins. Might not the recollection of past compliances with this shameful sin⁹ naturally have suggested the prayer—*Remove from me the way of lying*. But even in the profession of the Gospel, should we "be removed from him that called us into the grace of Christ unto another gospel;"¹⁰ should erroneous doctrines find a place in our system; and—as the natural consequence of doctrinal errors—should any inconsistency be marked in our practice; should there be any allowed principles of sinful indulgence, self-righteousness, conformity to the world, or shrinking from

¹ Prov. xii. 25.

² Isaiah lxi. 3.

³ Ib. l. 4.

⁴ Psalm xxii. 14.

⁵ Mark xiv. 33, with Heb. ii. 18.

⁶ Luke xxii. 43, with 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

⁷ 2 Cor. i. 5.

⁸ Psalm xlii. 11.

⁹ Isaiah xlv. 20.

¹⁰ 1 Sam. xxi. 13; xxvii. 10.

¹¹ Gal. i. 6.

the daily cross,—then, indeed, will the prayer naturally flow from our hearts—*Remove from me the way of lying.*

Most justly are ways such as these called “*ways of lying.*” They promise what it is impossible, in the nature of things, that they can ever perform: and prove to their deluded followers that “they that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercy.”¹ We can be at no loss to trace these “*ways*” to their proper source;—to him, who, “when he speaketh a lie, speaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it.”² A lie was his first, alas! too successful instrument of temptation, by which he “beguiled Eve through his subtlety,”³ and still does he lament, moreover, that he should still pursue the same deadly work throughout the world lying under his sway, beguiling the blinded “children of disobedience”⁴ into the awful deception of mistaking their God, and into the blind choice of preferring “broken cisterns” to “the fountain of living water.”⁵

The *gracious knowledge of the law* is the only means of the *removal* of this evil way. David—as a king—had it written by him.⁶ He wished it written on him. Not the book always before him—but on the heart. The external knowledge is the common benefit of all. The *gracious* knowledge is the covenant blessing of the Lord’s people⁷—the only effective principle of holiness. The law is still what it was—an enemy to the ungodly—forcing a hateful light upon their conscience—a delight to the servant of God—framing his will, and directing his conduct. Thus truth extirpates *lying*. Christ reigns instead of Belial.

Thus also we are enabled to “keep our hearts”—those leading wanderers, that mislead the rest.⁸ For wherever we see wandering eyes, wandering feet, and a wandering tongue, all flow from a heart, that has taken its own liberty in wandering from God. But with the law as our rule, and the Spirit as our guide, we shall be directed and kept in a safe and happy path.

Grant me thy law graciously. Grant me a clearer perception of its holy character—a more sensitive sprinkling from transgressing it—a more cordial approval of its spirit—a more entire conformity to its directions.

30. *I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.*

ONLY two ways lie before us for our choice—“*the way of lying*” and “*the way of truth.*” God by the light of his word guides us into one—Satan by his temptations allures us into the other. *The way of lying* is the natural choice of man. *The choice of the way of truth* is the Lord’s work in the hearts of his people—the seal of his special, eternal love. His teaching shows us *the way*;⁹ and his grace enables us to “choose” it.¹⁰ And who in his subsequent course has ever found reason to alter his first determination? Does Mary regret her choice of the “good part?”¹¹ One, whose solid and

¹ Jonah ii. 8.

² John viii. 44.

³ Gen. iii. 1—6, with 2 Cor. xi. 3.

⁴ Rev. xii. 9, with 2 Cor. iv. 4. Eph. ii. 2.

⁵ Jer. ii. 13.

⁶ Deut. xvii. 18, 19.

⁷ Heb. viii. 10.

⁸ Prov. iv. 23.

⁹ Ps. xxv. 4; xxxii. 8. Is. xlvi. 17.

¹⁰ Ps. cx. 3. Is. xlv. 3—5.

¹¹ Luke x. 42.

reflecting judgment was not likely to make a rash or hasty choice, tells us, of the outset of his course—"What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." The experience of twenty years—instead of bringing matter for repentance—only confirmed him in his choice; and he repeats his determination with increasing energy of expression; "*Yea doubtless and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*"¹ In the same spirit one of the ancient fathers expresses himself: 'If I have any possessions, health, credit, learning—this is all the contentment I have of them—that I may have *something to despise for Christ, who comprises in his own person all and everything that is most desirable.*'²

The connection of this verse with the preceding, well illustrates the bias of the believer's heart. His experience of the deceitfulness of sin, Satan, and his own heart, stirs up the prayer—"Remove from me the way of lying." But his choice is expressed in this verse—"I have chosen the way of truth." The sincere desire to have "*the way of lying removed from us,*" is a clear evidence, that we have already "*chosen the way of truth,*" that "the spirit of truth hath guided us to him,"³ who is indeed "*the way of truth*"—the true and only way to God!⁴ And of all ways that could be set before the Christian, this is the way he would "*choose*"—as bringing most glory to his God, exalting the Saviour, honoring the spirit of God, and securing the salvation of his own soul. Whatever becomes of me—the Christian would feel—'I would have no other way than this. Yea, though I should perish I would abide in it. So transcendent is the discovery of the glory of God—scarcely less clear than the glory of heaven itself!

The practical pathway, however, is often rugged—always narrow. We may have to encounter not only the reviling of an ungodly world, but even the suspicions of our brethren, who may not always understand our motives. Yet if our heart is upright with God, "none of these things will move us." Our choice is made, and we are prepared to abide the cost.⁵

But that our choice may be daily established, let us not forget the treasury of our life, light, and grace. Let us *lay the "judgments of God before us."* For we have always some new lesson to learn—some new duty to perform—some new snare to avoid. We must therefore walk by rule⁶—as under the eye of a jealous God, who enlightens and cheers our path—under the eye of the ungodly, who "watch for our halting"—under the eye of weak Christians, who might be stumbled by our unsteady walk—under the eye of established Christians, who will be yet further established by the testimony of our consistent profession. The Gospel affords all the material for this strict and accurate walk. All is given that is needed. The obedience that is enjoined is secured. "God

¹ Phil. iii. 7, 8.² 'Totus desirabilis et totum desirabile.'—Greg. Naz. Orat. i.³ John xvi. 13, 14.⁴ 1b. xiv. 6.⁵ Luke xiv. 28. Acts xx. 24.⁶ See Gal. vi. 16. Phil. iii. 16.

working in us,"¹ enables us to work for him; and while we are humbly looking for further supplies, and diligently improving what has been already bestowed, he is pledged by promise to assist,² as we are bound by duty to obey.

What then—let me inquire—is the choice which I have made? I would remember that it is for eternity. And if, through the grace that has first chosen me, "*I have chosen the way of truth*,"—is the effect of this choice daily visible in a life and conversation well-ordered according to the word of God? If it is good to "hide that word in my heart,"³ as a safe-guard against sin; it is good also "*to lay it before*" my eyes, as the chart to guide my course—the model to direct my work—the support to uphold my weakness.⁴

31. *I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame.*

WE have just seen the *choice* of the man of God, and the rule by which he acted upon it. Now we see his perseverance—*first choosing the way*—then *sticking to it*. While he complained of *his soul cleaving to the dust*,⁵ he would yet say—*I have stuck unto thy testimonies*—illustrating the Apostle's delineation of the Christian's two hearts (as a converted African expressed it) "I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."⁶ In the midst, however, of the most painful conflicts, the child of God holds fast his confidence. He feels that he hates the sin that he commits, and loves the Saviour, whom, in spite of himself, he dishonors; so that, with all his sins and unworthiness, he fears not to put in his claim among the family of God.

But, reader, seriously ask yourself—How did you become a Christian? Was it by birth and education, or by choice? If indeed by grace you have been enabled to "*choose the way of truth*," then be sure you firmly *stick to it*, or better, far better, that you had not made it at all. "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. It had been better for you not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after you have known it, to turn from the holy command-

¹ Phil. ii. 12, 13. Isaiah xxvi. 12.

² Isaiah xli. 10. Zech. x. 12.

³ Verse 11.

⁴ Joshua i. 8.

⁵ Verse 25.

⁶ Rom. vii. 22, 23, 25. Thus does Augustine graphically describe this conflict in his own mind—"The new will which began to be in me, whereby I would love thee, O my God! the only certain sweetness, was not yet able to overcome my former will, confirmed by long continuance. So my two wills, the one old, the other new; the one carnal, the other spiritual, conflicted between themselves, and rent my soul by their disagreement. Then did I understand by my own experience what I had read, how the 'flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit lusteth against the flesh.' I was myself on both sides, but more in that which I approved, than in that which I condemned, in myself, because for the most part I suffered reluctantly what I did willingly."—*Confess.* Book viii. ch. 5. Compare Rom. vii. 15—20.

ment delivered unto you.” Yet praised be God for the security of perseverance! He that enabled you to “put your hand to the plough” will keep it there in the habit of faith, firm and steadfast. “The Lord will perfect that which concerneth you.”²

Yet this cleaving to the Lord³ can only be maintained by unceasing conflict. The length and weariness of the way,⁴ and the slowness of your progress, are sources of constant and harassing trial. Revert then to the ground of your original *choice*. Was it made under the Lord’s light and direction? This reason may well bind you to “stick to” it: are not the ways of God as pleasant—Is not Christ as lovely—heaven as desirable—as at the beginning? Nay—have you not even more reason to adhere to your *choice*, than you had to make it? It was formed before at least you could fully know for yourself. Now “you have tasted”⁵—you have the seal of experience. Is not the crown more joyous in the nearer prospect?

Backslider! “Has God been unto you a wilderness, and a land of darkness,”⁶ that you virtually give your testimony after trial,—‘Satan is the better master, and I return to him?’—The world is the happiest path: and I will walk in it. This is indeed choosing a murderer in the stead of a Father—“forsaking the fountain” for the “broken cistern.”⁷ Oh! must there not be repentance in this path? May it be before it be too late! Ponder who it was that befriended you in the moment of awful extremity, and snatched you as a brand from the burning. Ponder the endearing proofs of his love—condescending to become a man—“a man of sorrows,”⁸ and to die in the agony of the cross, bearing for you the eternal curse of God.⁹ And does not gratitude remind you, what returns of faithful service are due from a creature so infinitely indebted to him? Surely the steadfast perseverance with which his heart clave to his costly work,¹⁰ may serve to put to shame your unsteadiness in “*sticking to his testimonies.*”

Believer! you are determined to abide by your choice—but not in your own strength. Remember him, who one hour declared, that he would sooner die with Christ than deny him; and the next hour denied him with oaths and curses.¹¹ Learn then to follow up your resolution with instant prayer—“*O Lord, put me not to shame.*” Leave me not to myself, lest I become a *shame* to myself and an offence to thy church. “I will keep thy statutes; O forsake me not utterly.”¹² Dependence upon the Lord, in a deep sense of our weakness, is the principle of perseverance. Never will he shut out the prayer of his faithful servant. He hath promised—“My people shall never be ashamed;”¹³ and therefore, taking firm hold of his promise, you may “go on your way rejoicing.”

¹ Luke ix. 62. John viii. 31. ² Peter ii. 21. ³ Ps. cxxviii. 8. ⁴ Acts xi. 23.

⁵ Numb. xxi. 4. ⁶ 1 Peter ii. 3. ⁷ Jer. ii. 31. ⁸ Jer. ii. 13.

⁹ Isaiah liii. 3. ¹⁰ Gal. iii. 13.

¹¹ Compare Matt. xvi. 23. Luke xii. 50. Heb. xii. 2, 3.

¹² Matt. xxvi. 57, 74.

¹³ Verse 8.

¹⁴ Joel ii. 27.

32. *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

A GLOWING picture of the Christian's delight in the ways of God! If we "*have chosen the way of God's commandments,*" and have been able to "*stick unto*" this way, surely we shall wish to "*run in it*" with constancy and cheerfulness. We shall want to mend our pace. If we walk, we shall long to "*run.*" There is always the same reason for progress, that there was for setting out. Necessity, advantage, enjoyment, spur us on to the end. Whatever progress we have made, we shall desire to make more; we shall go on praying and walking, and praying that we may walk with a swifter motion: we shall be dissatisfied, yet not discouraged—"faint, yet pursuing."¹ Now this is as it should be. This is after the pattern of the holy apostle—"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."² But the secret as well as the pattern of Christian progress is—looking beyond the Apostle, and the "so great cloud of witnesses with which we are encompassed"—and "looking unto Jesus."³ Faith is the principle of life, and supplies the daily motion of life; directing our eye to him as "the Author," until he "becomes the Finisher," of our faith. This is at once our duty, our privilege, our happiness, and our strength. This is the point at which we begin to run. Hitherto, the shackles of sin, self-righteousness, and unbelief, had hindered us; now we "so run, that we may obtain."⁴

But in "*the way of God's commandments*" how are we "so sore let and hindered" by a straitened heart! And how often do we feel the heart, as it were, "shut up, and it cannot get forth:"⁵ faith so low—desires so faint—hopes so narrow, that it seems impossible to make progress! Perhaps we "did run well," and have been "hindered."⁶ Perhaps the soul has been asleep in carelessness or self-indulgence; or unbelief in some of its varied forms has prevailed; and thus, while we "are not straitened" in God, we "are straitened in our own bowels."⁷ If then the rich fool thought of enlarging his barns, when his stores had increased upon him,⁸ much more should we be sending up the petition—"O that thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast!"⁹ Whatever cause we have to cry out—"My leanness, my leanness,"¹⁰—still, let us in the exercise of faith and prayer, be waiting for a more cheerful ability to love, serve, and praise. Let us be restless, till the prison-doors are again opened, and the command is issued to the prisoners—"Go forth; and to them that are in darkness—Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places."¹¹ Who knoweth but the Lord will once more shine upon us, once more unloose our fetters, and renew our strength?

Yet must every motion begin with God.¹² *I will run,*—but how?

¹ Judges viii. 4.

² Phil. iii. 13, 14.

³ Heb. xii. 1, 2.

⁴ 1 Cor. ix. 24.

⁵ Psalm lxxxviii. 8.

⁶ Gal. v. 7.

⁷ 2 Cor. vi. 12.

⁸ Luke xii. 16—19.

⁹ 1 Chron. iv. 10.

¹⁰ Isaiah xxiv. 16.

¹¹ Ib. xlix. 9.

¹² Prov. xvi. 1.

not in mine own strength, but by "the good hand of my God upon me,"¹ delivering and *enlarging my heart*. He does not say—I will make no efforts, unless thou work for me; but if *thou wilt enlarge—I will run*. Weakness is not the plea for indolence, but for quickening grace. "Draw me"—saith the Church—"we will run after thee." "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."² The secret of Christian energy and success is a *heart enlarged in the love of God*.

Let me then begin betimes—make haste—keep straight on—fix my eye on the mark—"endure unto the end." I may yet expect in the joy of blessed surprise to exclaim—"Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib."³ Godly sorrow had made me serious. Now let holy joy make me active. "The joy of the Lord is my strength;"⁴ and I am ready, under the power of constraining love,⁵ to work and to toil—to run without weariness, to "march onward" without fainting;⁶ not measuring my pace by my own strength, but looking to him who "strengtheneth with all might by his Spirit in the inner man."⁷

Happy fruit of wrestling prayer and diligent waiting on God! Joy in God, and strength to walk with him, with increasing knowledge of him, increasing communion with him, and increasing confidence in him.

PART V.

33. *Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.*

WE need no instruction in the way of sin. That has been our way, ever since Adam "sought out his own invention."⁸ The ungodly "desire no knowledge of *the way of God's statutes*."⁹ The heart leads the judgment, and "their heart is enmity to the law of God."¹⁰ But for a child of God, this is a prayer for daily use. For the more he is taught, the more he feels his need of teaching, and the more earnest are his cries for this invaluable blessing. We know nothing spiritually, except as we are taught of God. The blind man must be led the plainest and most direct, as well as in the more difficult and rugged paths. And thus do we need the shining of light from above—not only in "the deep things of God"—but for the reception of the most elementary truths. And yet we want not this knowledge for its own sake—to feed pride or speculation—but for its practical influence. For of what avail is the

¹ Ezra vii. 9.

² Cant. i. 4. ³ 2 Cor. iii. 17.

⁴ Cant. vi. 12.

⁵ Neh. viii. 10.

⁶ 2 Cor. v. 14.

⁷ Isaiah xl. 31, "march onward."—Bishop Lowth's Version.

⁸ Eph. iii. 16.

⁹ Eccl. vii. 29. Isa. liii. 6.

¹⁰ Job xxi. 14.

¹¹ Rom. viii. 7.

discovery even of important truth, if we be not moulded into its likeness, and constrained "into the obedience of faith?" The connection of every thought with Christian practice, here directed to its proper end, is a most striking proof of the Divine origin of the *statutes*. The most clear instructions for the regulation of our conduct flow from single sentences or expressions in these "*statutes!*" and this clearly proves an infinite wisdom in their distribution, a reference in the eternal mind to every detail of practical duty, and a Divine power and unction, applying the word to the several circumstances of daily conduct! For, indeed, what mind but the mind of God could have comprehended in so small a compass such a vast system of instruction? In this view, therefore, the Lord's teaching becomes the spring of obedience. For how can we "*keep*" a way which we do not understand? And who was ever "*taught the way of the Lord's statutes,*" who had not his heart constrained and directed by their spiritual beauty and sweetness? In this path we realize union with the Saviour; "the love of God is perfected in us;"² and our confidence is established before God.³

The object nearest to the believer's heart, and which causes him many an anxious and too often—many an unbelieving thought—is the grace of perseverance. Now the Lord's *teaching* is the principle of perseverance. It is "*the light of life*"⁴—enlightening the mind, and quickening the heart. Under this influence therefore we live—we endure—we cannot fail of *keeping the way unto the end*.⁵ Thus the end crowns the work. For with this blessing of perseverance, is sealed to us the hope of victory over our spiritual enemies, and the participation of our Saviour's glory.⁶ Confidence, indeed, without prayer and dependence upon our glorious Head, is most daring presumption; but that "*well-ordered and sure covenant,*" which "*is all our salvation, and all our desire,*" engages for our continuance in "*the way of the Lord's statutes!*" *I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts: and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*"⁷

34. *Give me understanding, and I will keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.*

'He that is his own teacher'—says Bernard—and one greater than Bernard,⁸ 'has a fool for his master.' Man cannot teach what he does not know; and of God, and of his law, he knows nothing. Therefore the beginning of wisdom is a consciousness of ignorance, a distrust of our own understanding, and the heart-felt prayer—"Give me understanding." The spiritual *understanding* is the gift of Jesus Christ.⁹ He directs us to himself, as its fountain—"I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."¹⁰ This

¹ 1 John iii. 24.

² Ib. 2. 5.

³ Ib. iii. 22.

⁴ John i. 4; viii. 12.

⁵ 1 John ii. 27.

⁶ Rev. ii. 26-28.

⁷ Jer. xxxii. 40; xxxi. 33; with 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

⁸ Prov. xxviii. 26.

⁹ 1 John ii. 20.; v. 20.

¹⁰ John viii. 12; also xii. 46.

understanding differs from mere intellectual discernment or speculative knowledge. It is the spring of spiritual activity in our walk with God;¹ so that our obedience is not outward and reluctant, but filial delight and wholeness of heart:—we desire not only to *keep the law of God to the end*, but every day *to the end*—“*with our whole heart.*”—Such are our obligations towards him, that we ought to study very accurately the character of our walk with him; always remembering that service without *the heart—the whole heart*—is hateful in his sight,² and that what is now wilfully withheld, will gradually draw away the rest in apostasy from him. Now are we seeking more “engagedness of heart” for him. Then will this prayer be a suitable expression of our need, and the utterance of a humble, resolute petitioner. It is not, however, enough that we have once received, unless we are constantly receiving. We must ask, that we may receive; but after we have received, we must ask again. Yet is this prayer never offered up, until the soul has in part received what it is here seeking for. The natural man is “wise in his own conceit,” and has therefore no idea of his need of Divine teaching.

But we must not be satisfied with even a clear apprehension of the doctrines of the Bible, and of the “truth as it is in Jesus.” “*Give me understanding*”—‘not only that I may believe these doctrines, but that I may *keep and observe* them.’ In every path of duty, this cry is repeated, with an importunity that is never wearisome to the ears of our gracious Father. And in how many unnoticed instances has the answer been vouchsafed when some clear and heavenly ray, darting unexpectedly into the mind, or some providential concurrence of unforeseen circumstances, has disentangled a path before intricate and involved, and marked it before us with the light of a sunbeam! How many whispers of conscience! how many seasonable suggestions in moments of darkness and perplexity may the observant child of God record, as the answer to this needful prayer—“Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.”³ Nor will our growth in spiritual *understanding* fail to evidence itself in the steady consistency of a well-ordered conversation—“Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.”⁴ If then knowledge is valuable according to its usefulness, one ray of this practical knowledge—the result of prayer for heavenly teaching,—is more to be prized than the highest attainments of speculative religion—flowing from mere human instruction.

35. *Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.*

WE are equally ignorant of *the path of God's commandments*, and impotent to *go in it*. We need therefore double assistance. Our mind must be enlightened; our hearts constrained; else our

¹ See Col. i. 9. 10.

² Isaiah i. 11—15. Hosea x. 2. Acts v. 1—10.

³ Psalm cvii. 43.

⁴ James iii. 13.

knowledge of this humbling *path* would make us shrink from it. But under the complete influence of Divine grace, when *understanding has been given* to discern the beauty of it, the soul's warmest desire is fixed upon it—Conscious helplessness looks upward—*Make me to go*; and he who said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house," speaks the same word of quickening life and power to the soul, "*giving heed*," "expecting to receive something of him."¹ It is delightful to acknowledge of this work, that "All is of God"—that "it is he that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure."² To him only can it belong. For since the natural inclination "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be;"³ Almighty power must introduce a new and active bias—"Turn thou me, and I shall be turned"⁴—"Make me to go in the path of thy commandments."

But even when brought into *this path*, still we want accelerated motion to run with increasing alacrity. We want to take "the Lord God for our strength; and he shall make our feet like hind's feet, and shall *make us to walk* upon our high places."⁵ The *path*, indeed, is uninviting to the eye of sense. This distorted vision brings all its difficulties into full view; hiding all its counterbalancing enjoyments. Let us, however, exercise that "faith, which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."⁶ Let us exhibit our proper character, "walking by faith, and not by sight,"⁷ and our discernment of unseen things will be more clear, and our enjoyment of them more permanent. The prayer will then be with increasing earnestness—"Make me to go in the path of thy commandments."

But we must not be content with walking in this way; we must seek to "*delight in it*." Delight is the marrow of religion. "God loveth a cheerful giver,"⁸ and accepts obedience only when it is given, not when it is *forced*. He loves the service of that man, who considers it his highest privilege to render it, and whose heart rejoices in the way, "as a giant to run his race."⁹ Fervent prayer and cheerful obedience, mark the experience of the thriving Christian. As a true "child of Zion, he is joyful in his king;"¹⁰ he loves his service, and counts it "perfect freedom"—the rule of love, mercy, and grace.

But is the self-condemned penitent distressed by this description of a child of God? He cannot find the same marks in himself; and he too hastily concludes, that he does not belong to the heavenly family; not considering, that his very grief is caused by his love to, and "*delight in*" that way in which he is so hindered, and in which he daily prays—"Make me to go." It was probably the same sense of weakness and inability, "*to go in the path of God's commandments*," which urged David's prayer; and if it urges yours, poor trembling penitent,—if it sends you to a throne of grace,

¹ Matt. ix. 6, with Acts iii. 4, 5.

² 2 Cor. v. 18. Phil. ii. 13.

³ Rom. viii. 7.

⁴ Jer xxxi. 18.

⁵ Hab. iii. 19.

⁶ Heb. xi. 1.

⁷ 2 Cor. v. 7.

⁸ 2 Cor. ix. 7.

⁹ Psalm xix. 5; cxii. 1.

¹⁰ Ib. cxlix. 2.

you will, ere long, receive an answer of peace, and “go on your way rejoicing.”

This *delight in the path* is not only following the “man after God’s own heart;” but it is the image of David’s Lord, and our forerunner in this path. He could testify to his Father—“I delight to do thy will, O my God:”¹ and to his disciples, “I have meat to eat that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work:”² and as a proof of the intenseness of his delight, he could to their great amazement, “go before them”³ to Jerusalem, unappalled by the “baptism” of blood which awaited him; yea, even “straitened” with the unquenchable ardor of his love, “until it was accomplished.”⁴

36. *Incline my heart unto thy testimonies,—and not to covetousness.*

BUT what “*makes us to go in the path of God’s commandments?*” The force of his Almighty love effectually *inclines* the will, as with a Divine touch. “The day of his power, in which he makes us willing,” is a time of love. “I drew them”—saith he—“with cords of a man, and with bands of love.”⁵ Every man, who is conscious of the counteracting bias within, will deeply feel the need of this prayer—“*Incline my heart.*” The native principle of man draws him to his own self—to his own indulgence—pleasure—*covetousness*—assuming a thousand forms of gratifying self, at the expense of love to God. Few but are ready to condemn this principle in others, while perhaps it may be their own “easily besetting sin.” When the mind is grasping after the world, as if it were our portion, we have the greatest reason to “take heed” to our Lord’s admonition, and “beware of covetousness.”⁶ When we invest earthly gratifications with any inherent excellency—*virtually* putting them in the place of God—then will be a season for special supplication—*Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.*

There is probably no principle so opposed to the *Lord’s testimonies*. It casts out the principle of obedience, since the love of God cannot co-exist with the love of the world;⁷ and the very desire to serve Mammon is a proof of unfaithfulness to God.⁸ We mark the deadly influence in direct breaches of the law of God. Balaam, in the indulgence of this propensity, set his will in mad contradiction to God.⁹ Ahab was tempted to murder.¹⁰ David to murder and adultery.¹¹ Achan to steal.¹² Judas—both to steal from his fellows and to betray his master.¹³ Gehazi and Ananias to lying.¹⁴ And besides—what is the matter of common but painful observation—how much of the good seed of the kingdom, that was springing up with the promise of a plentiful harvest, has this weed of

¹ Psalm xl. 8, with Heb. x. 7.

² John iv. 32, 34.

³ Mark x. 32.

⁴ Luke xii. 50.

⁵ Psalm cx. 3. Ezek. xvi. 8. Hosea xi. 4.

⁶ Luke xii. 15.

⁷ 1 John ii. 15.

⁸ Matt. vi. 24.

⁹ Numb. xxii. 15—21. 2 Peter ii. 14—16.

¹⁰ 1 Kings 21. 1—13.

¹¹ 2 Sam. xi. 2—17.

¹² Joshua vii. 21.

¹³ John xii. 6. Matt. xxvi 14—16.

¹⁴ 2 Kings v. 20—26. Acts v. 1—8.

rank luxuriance “choked, that it has become unfruitful!”¹ Our Lord’s parables therefore²—his providence³—his promises⁴—his terms of discipleship⁵—his counsels⁶—his own example of poverty and renunciation of this world’s comforts⁷—all are directed against this destructive principle. The power of the love of Christ delivered Matthew⁸ and Zaccheus⁹ from its influence, and “*inclined their hearts to the testimonies of God.*” And has not faith still the same power to turn the heart from the world, from sin, from self to Christ? Learn then to rest upon the promises of his love,¹⁰ and to delight in his *testimonies*. Earthly cares will be cast upon him, and earthly prospects will lose their splendor.¹¹ This life of faith—living in union with a heavenly Saviour, involves the only effective principle of resistance. Those who are risen with Christ will be temperate in earthly things, “setting their affections on things above.” Such—such alone—will “mortify the members that are upon the earth—evil concupiscence, and *covetousness, which is idolatry.*”¹²

We desire to sit loose to our earthly comforts.¹³ Are we enabled to check our natural discontent with the Lord’s dealings with us, and to restrain our eagerness to “seek great things for ourselves”¹⁴ by the recollection of his word—“Seek them not?”¹⁵

Let us not forget, that the inclination—even if it is not brought into active and perceptible motion, is fatally destructive of the life of religion. “They that *will be rich*¹⁶ fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” Awful warning to professors!—“The love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”¹⁷ A most important exhortation to the people of God!—“But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness.”¹⁸ If the Lord loves you, he will not indeed lose you; but unless you “take heed, and beware of covetousness,” he will not spare you. In the midst therefore of temptation without, and a world of sin within, go onwards with the pilgrim’s¹⁹ prayer indelibly fixed on your heart—“*Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.*”

¹ Mark iv. 19.—The example of the rich young man, Matt. xix. 21, 22. Demas, 2 Tim. iv. 10.

² Luke xii. 16—21; xvi. 14, 19, &c.

³ Matt. vi. 25—31.

⁴ Ib. v. 33. Psalm xxxiv. 9, 10. Isaiah xxxiii. 15, 16. 1 Peter v. 7.

⁵ Matt. xvi. 24; xix. 27—29. Luke xiv. 33.

⁶ 1 Cor. vii. 29—31. Phil. iv. 5.

⁷ Matt. viii. 20.

⁸ Ib. ix. 9.

⁹ Luke xix. 1—10.

¹⁰ Heb. xiii. 5.

¹¹ Compare Luke xii. 15, with parallel verses 16—21.

¹² Col. iii. 1—5.

¹³ Gen. iii. 5, 6.

¹⁴ Jer. vi. 13.

¹⁵ Ib. xlv. 5.

¹⁶ Ο Βυλομενοι κλυσειν. 1 Tim. vi. 9.—The very inclination to be rich is alienation from him, who by just right claims the supreme undisputed whole—“My son, give me thine heart.” Prov. xxiii. 26.

¹⁷ 1 Tim. vi. 10.

¹⁸ Ib. 11.

¹⁹ 1 Peter ii. 11.

37. *Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.*

So strongly does the man of God deprecate temptation to self-indulgence, that he prays to be kept at the greatest possible distance from it. That his *heart* may not be *inclined to it*; he desires that *his eyes may be turned from beholding it*. Keeping the eye is a grand means of "keeping the heart."¹ Satan has infused his poison into all the objects around us, that all furnishes fuel for temptation, and the heart—naturally inclined to evil and hankering after vanity—is stolen away in a moment. *Vanity* includes "all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." All is sin, because "it is not of the Father, but is of the world."² Of all that belongs to earth—"the preacher, the son of David"—standing on the vantage-ground, and having taken within his view the widest horizon of this world's excellency, has pronounced his judgment—"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities! all is vanity."³ We have just mentioned the lusts of other things choking *many a promising profession*. Our Lord's solemn caution to his own disciples implies their injury to a *sincere profession*—"Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life; and so that day come upon you unawares."⁴ Some indeed seem to walk, as if they were proof against temptation. They venture to the very edge of the precipice, under a vain assurance that no danger is to be apprehended. But such a confidence is upon the brink of a grievous fall.⁵ The tender-hearted child of God, trusting in the promise, that "Sin shall not have dominion over him," knows that he can only enjoy the security of it, while he is shrinking from every occasion of sin. He "hates even the garment spotted by the flesh;"⁶ and, remembering how often his outward senses have ministered to the workings of his weak and treacherous heart,⁷ he continues in prayer—"Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity."

Probably the recollection of the circumstance of his own sin,⁸ would to the end of his life remind David of his special need of this prayer. Yet who that is conscious of his own weakness and corruption, will find the prayer unsuitable to his circumstances of daily temptation? But we must watch as well as pray. For as watchfulness without prayer is presumption, so prayer without watchfulness is self-delusion. To pray that "*our eyes*" may be "*turned from vanity*," without "making a covenant with our eyes,"⁹ that they should not *behold* it, is like "taking fire in our bosoms," and expecting "not to be burnt,"¹⁰ because we have prayed that we might not be burnt. If we pray not to be "led into temp-

¹ Numb. xv. 39. Job. xxxi. 1.

⁴ Luke xxi. 34.

⁷ Jude 23.

⁹ 2 Sam. xi. 2.

² John ii. 16.

⁵ Prov. xvi. 18.

⁸ See Prov. xxiii. 33.

¹⁰ Job xxx. 1.

³ Eccl. i. 2; also ii. 1—12.

⁶ Rom. vi. 14.

Josh. vii. 21.

¹¹ Prov. vi. 27, 28.

tation," we must "watch, that we enter not into it."¹ The sincerity of our prayer will be proved by the watchfully avoiding the circumstances and occasions of temptation. The fear of sin will manifest itself by a fear of temptation to sin. "The knife will be put to the throat, if we be given to appetite."² We shall be afraid of the wine sparkling in the glass.³

But where is the harm of *beholding vanity*, if we do not follow it? When Eve *beheld* the forbidden fruit, perhaps she did not think of taking it: and when she took it, she did not think of eating it: but the beginning of sin "is as the letting out of water;" whose progress once opened, beats down all before it.⁴ And who, after our "beguiled mother," has not found the eye an inlet to sin?⁵ When Bunyan's pilgrims were obliged to pass through Vanity Fair, beset on every side with temptations and allurements, they stopped their eyes and ears, and quickening their pace, cried—"Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." A striking reproof to us, who too often loiter and gaze, until we begin to covet those vanities, to which, as Christians, we "are dead!"⁶

Is it asked—What will most effectually "*turn my eyes from vanity?*" Not the seclusion of contemplative retirement—not the relinquishment of our lawful connection with the world; but the transcendent beauty of Jesus unveiled to our eyes, and fixing our hearts. This will "*turn our eyes from vanity*" in its most glittering forms! The sight of the "pearl of great price"⁷ dims the lustre of the "goodliest pearls" of earth; at once deadens us to the enticements of the world, and urges us forward in the pursuit of the prize. And is not this our object? It is not enough that through special mercy I am preserved from temptations. I want to be *quickened* to more life, energy, delight, and devotedness *in the way of my God*. The secret of Christian progress is simplicity and diligence. "*This one thing I do*—forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things that are before; I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."⁸ The spirit leaves no wish of the heart for *beholding vanity*. The world, with all its flowery paths, is a dreary wilderness: and Christ and heaven are the only objects of desire—"He that shutteth his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; bread shall be given him, his water shall be sure. *Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.*"⁹—Precious promises to those that flee from temptation, and desire to walk in the ways of God!

¹ Compare Matt. vi. 13, with xxvi. 41.

² Prov. xxiii. 2.

³ Verses 31, 32.

⁴ Gen. iii. 6, with Prov. xvii. 14.

⁵ Lot's wife; Gen. xix. 26. Shechem; xxxiv. 2. Potiphar's wife; xxxix. 7. Joshua vii. 21. Samson; Judges xvi. 1. Even the man after God's own heart; 2 Sam. xi. 2. Comp. Prov. vi. 25. Matt. v. 28. 2 Peter ii. 14.

⁶ See Col. iii. 2, 3.

⁷ Matt. xiii. 46.

⁸ Phil. iii. 13, 14.

⁹ Isaiah xxxiii. 15—17.

38. *Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.*

OFTEN—instead of being *quicken*ed in the way—I am fainting under the pressure of unbelief. What then is my resource? Only *the word* of promise. Lord! seal—*stablish thy word unto thy servant—devoted* as I am—as I would be—to *thy fear*. If “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”¹—a “treasure”²—a “strong confidence”³—“a fountain of life”⁴—how wise—how rich—how safe—how happy—is he that “*is devoted to*” it! “Blessed” indeed is he—with the favor of his God,⁵ the secret of his love,⁶ the teaching of his grace,⁷ and the mercy of his covenant.⁸ The promises of the Old Testament are generally connected with the fear of God, as in the New Testament they are linked with faith. But in truth, so identified are these two principles in their operation, that the faith, by which we apprehend the forgiveness of God, and the privileges of his kingdom, issues in a godly, reverential, filial *fear*?⁹ To be *devoted to this fear*, completes the character of a *servant of God*—the highest honor in the universe—the substantial joy of heaven itself.¹⁰ It is an obedience of choice, of reverence, and of love. “Joining himself to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord,—to be his servant.”¹¹ “Yes, gracious Lord, I had rather be bound than loosed. I only wished to be loosed from the bonds of sin, that I might be bound to thee for ever. My heart is treacherous; lay thine own bonds upon me. “O Lord, truly I am thy servant: thou hast loosed my bonds;”¹² *I am “devoted to thy fear.”* Is this my desire, my mind, my determination, my character? Then let me plead my title to an interest in the promises of the word—rich and free, “exceeding great and precious”¹³—all mine—“yea, and amen in Christ Jesus”¹⁴ let me plead, that every *word* may be “*established*” in my victory over sin, advancing knowledge of Christ, experience of his love, conformity to his image, and finally, in my preservation in him unto eternal life.

But how far *has* the fear of God operated with me as a safeguard from sin,¹⁵ and an habitual rule of conduct?¹⁶ David’s confidence in the promises of God, far from lessening his jealousy over himself, only made him more “*devoted to the fear*” of God. And if my assurance be well-grounded, it will be ever accompanied with holy fear; the influence will be known by “standing more in awe of God’s word;”¹⁷ having a more steady abhorrence of sin, and a dread of “grieving the Holy Spirit of God.” Thus this filial fear produces a holy confidence; while confidence serves to strengthen fear: and their mutual influence quickens devotedness to the work of the Lord.

It is interesting to remark, that the Christian privilege of assu-

¹ Psalm cxi. 10.

² Isaiah xxxiii. 6.

³ Prov. xiv. 26.

⁴ Ib. 27.

⁵ Psalm xxxiii. 18.

⁶ Ib. xxv. 14.

⁷ Ib. 12.

⁸ Ib. ciii. 17.

⁹ Ib. cxxx. 4. Compare Jer. xxxiii. 8, 9. Hosea iii. 5; also Heb. xii. 28.

¹⁰ Rev. vii. 15; xxii. 3.

¹¹ Isaiah lvi. 6.

¹² Psalm cxvi. 16.

¹³ 2 Peter i. 4.

¹⁴ 2 Cor. i. 20.

¹⁵ Gen. xxxix. ix. Neh. v. 15.

Prov. xvi. 6.

¹⁶ Prov. xxiii. 17.

¹⁷ Verse 161.

rance is not confined to the New Testament dispensation. David's pleading to have the "*word of his God stablished unto him*,"¹ was grounded upon the tried foundations of faith. And this direct act of faith, as it regards God in Christ, his engagements, and his promises, cannot be too confident. The promises are made to the whole Church, that we might each look for our part and interest in them. God loves to have his own seal and hand-writing brought before him. "Put me in remembrance"—saith he: "let us plead together." "He cannot deny himself."² This is the exercise and the power of faith. I bring my wants. I bring *thy word* of promise. *Stablish thy word unto thy servant.* Thou hast bought me with a precious price: thou hast made me thine: thou hast subdued my heart to thyself, so that it is now "*devoted to thy fear.*" Whatsoever, therefore, thy covenant has provided for my sanctification, my humiliation, my chastisement, my present and everlasting consolation—"Stablish this word:" let it be fulfilled in me; for I am "*thy servant, devoted to thy fear.*"

39. *Turn away my reproach which I fear; for thy judgments are good.*

THERE is a *reproach*, that we have no cause to *fear*, but rather to glory in. It is one of the chief privileges of the Gospel³—the honorable badge of our profession.⁴ But it was the "*reproach*" of bringing dishonor upon the name of his God, that David *feared*,⁵ and deprecated with most anxious importunate prayer. The fear of this *reproach* is a practical principle of tender watchfulness and circumspection, and of habitual dependence upon an Almighty upholding power. "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe"⁶—will be the constant supplication of one that fears the Lord, and fears himself. We do not perhaps sufficiently consider the active malice of the enemies of the Gospel "watching for our halting;"⁷ else should we be more careful to remove all occasions of "*reproach*" on account of inconsistency of temper or conversation. None therefore that feel their own weakness, the continual apprehension of danger, the tendency of their heart to backslide from God, and to disgrace "that worthy name by which they are called,"⁸ will think this prayer unseasonable or unnecessary—"Turn away my reproach which I fear."

Perhaps also the conflicting Christian may find this a suitable prayer. Sometimes Satan has succeeded in beguiling him into some worldly compliance, or weakened his confidence, by tempting

¹ Mark this petition drawn out by David into a full pleading with his God, 2 Sam. vii. 25, 28, 29. The expression also of the same confidence will afterwards be noticed. Verse 49.

² Isaiah xliii. 26. 2 Tim. ii. 13.

³ Matt. v. 10—12. Compare Phil. i. 29.

⁴ Acts v. 41; xxiv. 5; xxviii. 22. Heb. xiii. 13. 1 Pet. iv. 12—16.

⁵ 2 Sam. xii. 14. We find Saul strongly deprecating this *reproach*—"I have sinned; yet honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel." (1 Sam. xv. 30.) But how different the principle in these two instances under a similar trial! The one tremblingly alive, that the name of God might not be reproached through his shameful fall. The other earnest only to secure his own reputation.

⁶ Verse 1.

⁷ Jer. xx. 10.

⁸ James ii. 7.

him to look to himself for some warrant of acceptance, (in all which suggestions he is aided and abetted by his treacherous heart :) and then will this "accuser of the brethren" turn back upon him, and change himself into "an angel of light," presenting before him a black catalogue of those very falls, into which he had successfully led him. Bunyan does not fail to enumerate these "*reproaches*" as amongst the most harassing assaults of Apollyon. In his desperate conflict with Christian, he taunts him with his fall into the Slough of Despond, and every successive deviation from his path, as blotting out his warrant of present favor with the king, and blasting all hopes of reaching the celestial city. Christian does not attempt to conceal or palliate the charge. He knows it is all true, and much more besides; but he knows this is true also—"Where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded." "The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth from all sin."¹ Believers! In the heat of your conflict remember the only effective covering. "*Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*"² Do you not hate the sins, with which you have been overtaken? Are you not earnestly longing for deliverance from their power? Then even while the recollections of their guilt and defilement humble you before the Lord, take fresh hold of the Gospel, and you shall "overcome by the blood of the Lamb."³ Victory must come from the cross. And the soul that is directing its eye thither for pardon, strength, and consolation, may sigh out the prayer with acceptance—"Turn away my reproach which I fear."

But how deeply is the guilt of apostasy or backsliding aggravated by the acknowledgment which all are constrained to make—"Thy judgments are good!" How affecting is the Lord's ex-postulation with us!—"What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense."⁴ No, surely we have nothing to complain of our Master, of his work, or of his wages; but much, very much, to complain of ourselves, of our watchfulness, neglect, backsliding, and to humble ourselves on account of the consequent *reproach* upon our profession.

Never, however, let us cease to cry, that all *the reproach which we fear* on account of our allowed inconsistencies of profession, may for the Church's sake, be "*turned away from us.*" Meanwhile, "let us accept it as the punishment of our iniquity,"⁵ and in the recollection of the "*goodness of the Lord's judgments,*" still venture to hope and look for the best things to come out of it, from our gracious Lord.

¹ Rom. v. 20. 1 John i. 7.

² Eph. vi. 16.

³ Rev. xii. 9—11.

⁴ Jer. ii. 5. Micah vi. 3. Isaiah xliii. 23.

⁵ Lev. xxvi. 41.

40. Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.

BEHOLD! An appeal to the heart-searching God—"Thou knowest that I love"¹ *thy precepts!* The heart-felt acknowledgment of their *goodness* naturally leads to *long after them.*² The professor *longs after* the promises, and too often builds a delusive—because an unsanctifying hope upon them. The believer feels it to be his privilege and safety to have an equal regard to both—to obey *the precepts of God* in dependence on his promises, and to expect the accomplishment of the promises, in way of obedience to *the precepts.* The utmost extent of the professor's service is the heavy yoke of *outward conformity.* He knows nothing of an *inward delight, and "longing after them."* Of many of them his heart complains, "This is a hard saying: who can hear it?"³ The Christian can give a good reason for his delight even in the most difficult and painful "*precepts.*" The moments of deepest repentance are his times of the sweetest "refreshing from the presence of the Lord."⁴ Whatever be the pleasure of indulgence in sin, far greater is the ultimate enjoyment arising out of the mortification of it.⁵ Most fruitful is our Saviour's *precept,* which inculcates on his followers self-denial and the daily cross.⁶ For by this wholesome discipline we lose our own perverse will; the power of sin is restrained, the pride of the heart humbled; and our real happiness fixed upon a solid and permanent basis. So that, whatever dispensation some might desire for breaking the *precept* without forfeiting the promise, the Christian blesses God for the strictness that binds him to a steady obedience to it. To him it is grievous, not to keep it, but to break it. A "*longing*" therefore "*after the precepts,*" marks the character of the child of God, and may be considered as the pulse of the soul. It forms our meetness and ripeness for heaven.

There are indeed times, when the violence of temptation, or the paralyzing effect of indolence, hide the movements of the "hidden man of the heart." And yet even in these gloomy hours, when the mouth is shut, and the heart dumb, before God—"so troubled that it cannot speak,"⁷—even then, acceptable incense is ascending before the throne of God. We have a powerful intercessor "helping our infirmities"—interpreting our desires, and crying from within, "with groanings that cannot be uttered;"⁸ yet such as being indited by our advocate within, and presented by our Advocate above,⁹ are cheering earnest of their fulfilment. "He will fulfil the desire

¹ Compare John xxi. 17.

² Compare the same acknowledgment, Rom. vii. 12, connected with similar delight, 22.

³ John vi. 60.

⁴ Acts iii. 19. Luther says the practice of repentance was ever sweeter to him, after hearing the expression of an old divine—"That is kind repentance, which begins from the love of God."

⁵ See David's lively expression of gratitude—first to his God—then to the instrument employed by him—(Abigail) in restraining him from the gratification of most unjustifiable revenge.—1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

⁶ Luke ix. 23.

⁷ Psalm lxxvii. 4.

⁸ Rom. viii. 26.

⁹ Heb. ix. 24. Rev. viii. 3, 4.

of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them."¹

These *longings* might seem to betoken a vigorous exercise of grace. But shall I be satisfied, while the most fervent desires are so disproportioned to their grand object—so overborne by the corruption of the flesh²—and while a heartless state is so hateful to my Saviour?³ Idle confessions and complaints are unseemly and unfruitful. Let me rather besiege the mercy-seat with incessant importunity⁴—“*Quicken me in thy righteousness.*” “I plead thy righteousness—thy righteous promise for the reviving of my spiritual life. I long for more lively apprehensions of thy spotless righteousness. Oh! let it invigorate my delight, my obedience, my secret communion, my Christian walk and conversation.” Such *longings*, poured out before the Lord for a fresh supply of *quickening* grace, are far different from “the desire of the slothful which killeth him,”⁵ and will not be forgotten before God. “Delight thyself in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”⁶ O for a more enlarged expectation, and a more abundant vouchsafement of blessing; that we may burst forth and break out, as from a living fountain within,⁷ in more ardent *longings for the Lord's precepts!*

But it may be asked—What weariness in, and reluctance to duties, may consist with the principle and exercise of grace? Where it is only in the members, not in the mind—where it is only partial, not prevalent—where it is only occasional, not habitual—where it is lamented and resisted, and not allowed—and where, in spite of its influence, the Christian still holds on the way of duty—“grace reigns” in the midst of conflict, and will ultimately and gloriously triumph over all hindrance and opposition. But in the midst of the humbling views of sin that present themselves on every side, let me diligently inquire—Have I an habitual “hungering and thirsting after righteousness?” And since, at the best, I do but get my longings increased, and not satisfied, let the full satisfaction of heaven be much in my heart. “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”⁸

And what an expectation is this to pretend to! To think what the infinitely—eternally blessed God is—and what “man is at his best estate”⁹—then to conceive of man the worm of the dust—the child of sin and wrath—transformed into the likeness of God—how weighty is the sound of this hope! What then must its substantiation be? If the initial privilege be glorious,¹⁰ what will the fullness be!¹¹ Glory revealed to us! transfused through us! becoming our very being? To have the soul filled—not with evanescent shadows—but with massive, weighty, eternal glory!¹² Worlds are

¹ Psalm cxlv. 19.

⁴ Matt. xi. 12.

⁷ John iv. 14; vii. 38.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

² Rom. vii. 18—24.

⁵ Prov. xxi. 25.

⁸ Psalm xvii. 15.

¹¹ 1 John iii. 2.

³ Rev. iii. 16.

⁶ Psalm xxxvii. 4.

⁹ 1b. xxxix. 5.

¹² 2 Cor. iv. 17.

mere empty bubbles compared with this our sure, satisfying, unfading inheritance.

PART VI.

41. *Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord; even thy salvation, according to thy word.*

A PRAYER of deep anxiety—large desire—simple faith! It is a sinner—feeling his need of mercy—yea *mercies*—abundant mercy¹—mercies for every moment—looking for them only in the *Lord's salvation*—to be dispensed *according to his word*. Out of Christ we know only a God of justice and holiness. In Christ we behold a just God, and yet a Saviour:² and in “his *salvation* mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”³ Therefore general notions of *mercy* without a distinct apprehension of “*salvation*”—have their origin in presumption, not in warranted faith. For can there be any communication of mercy from an unknown God? Can there be any intercourse with an angry God? “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee”⁴—“*The Lord's mercies, even his salvation.*”

This prayer, however, is peculiarly suitable to the believer, longing to realize that which sometimes is clouded to his view—his personal interest in the *Lord's salvation*! It must *come to me*; or I shall never come to it. I want not a general apprehension—I am not satisfied with the description of it. *Let it come to me—let thy mercies* be applied, so that I can claim them and rejoice in them. I see *thy salvation* come to others. Who needs it more than I? *Let it come also unto me. Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me*, as thou used to do to those that love thy name. “*Remember me, O Lord, with the favor that thou bearest to thy people; O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the felicity of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.*”⁵

Now, are we seeking the assurance of this *salvation*? Are we waiting to realize its present power, saving us from sin—Satan—the world—ourselves—and “*blessing us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus?*” Should a trial of faith and patience be ordained for us, yet in the end we shall find an enriching store of experience from His wise dispensations. That he has kept us from turning

¹ Psalm li. 1.

² Isa. xlv. 21.

³ Psalm lxxxv. 9, 10. Comp. Rom. iii. 26.

⁴ Job xxii. 21.

⁵ Verse 132. Psalm cvi. 4, 5.

our backs upon his ways, when we had no comfort in them; that he has upheld us with secret supplies of strength—is not this the work of his own Spirit within, and the pledge of the completion of the work? That he has enabled us, against all discouragements, to “continue instant in prayer,” is surely an answer to that prayer, which in our apprehensions of it had been cast out. That in waiting upon him, we have found no rest in worldly consolation, is an assurance that the Lord himself will be our soul-satisfying and eternal portion. And who is there now in the sensible enjoyment of his love, who does not bless that Divine wisdom, which took the same course with them that has been taken with us, to bring them to these joys? When did a weeping seed-time fail of bringing a joyful harvest!¹

But let not the ground of faith be forgotten—“*According to thy word,*”—that it shall come fully—freely—eternally—to him that waiteth for it.² “Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness; those that remember thee in thy ways.”³ Many indeed are satisfied with far too low a standard of spiritual enjoyments. It is comfortless to live at a distance from our Father’s house, when we might be dwelling in the secret of his presence, and rejoicing in the smiles of his love. But let us not charge this dishonorable state upon the sovereignty of the Divine dispensations. Let us rather trace it to its true source—want of desire—want of faith—want of prayer—want of diligence. What infinite need have we of heavenly influence! What gracious encouragement to seek it! The way was blocked up—mercy has cleared the path, opened our access.—“The golden sceptre is always held out.”⁴ Earnest prayer will bring a sure answer. The blessing is unspeakable. *Let thy mercies—thy salvation—come unto me, O Lord.*

42. *So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me; for I trust in thy word.*

WHAT is the salvation which he had just been speaking of? The whole gift of the mercy of God—redemption from sin, death, and hell—pardon, peace, and acceptance with a reconciled God—constant communication of spiritual blessings—all that God can give or we can want; all that we are able to receive here, or heaven can perfect hereafter. Now, if this “*comes to us*”—comes to our hearts—surely it will furnish us at all times with “*an answer to him that reproacheth us.*” The world casts upon us the *reproach* of the cross. “What profit is there to walk mournfully before the Lord of Hosts?”⁵ What is there to counterbalance the relinquishment of pleasure, esteem, and worldly comfort? The professor can give no answer. He has heard of it, but it has never *come to him*. The believer is ready with his *answer*, I have found in the *Lord’s salvation* pardon and peace—“not as the world giveth”

¹ Psalm cxxvi. 5, 6.

² *Ib.* xxxiii. 22. Compare v. 81.

³ Isaiah lxiv. 5.

⁴ Esther v. 2.

⁵ Malachi iii. 14.

—and such as the world cannot take away. Here therefore do I abide, finding it *my happiness* not to live without the cross, and testifying in the midst of abounding tribulation, that there are no comforts like Christ's comforts. This was David's *answer*, when family trials were probably an occasion of *reproach*, "*Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation and all my desire.*"¹

But there is a far heavier *reproach* than that of the world—when the grand accuser injects hard thoughts of God—when he throws our guilt and unworthiness—our helplessness and difficulties in our face. And how severe is this exercise in a season of spiritual desertion! Except the believer can stay his soul upon "a God that hideth himself, as still the God of Israel, the Saviour,"² he is unprepared with an *answer to him that reproacheth him*. Such appears to have been Job's condition,³ and Heman's,⁴ not to speak of many of the Lord's most favored people, at different stages of their Christian life. Most important therefore is it for us to pray for a realizing sense of *the Lord's mercies—even of his salvation*—not only as necessary for our peace and comfort—but to garrison us against every assault, and to enable us to throw down the challenge, "*Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.*"⁵ Free grace has saved me—an unspotted righteousness covers me—an Almighty arm sustains me—eternal glory awaits me. Who shall condemn? "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?"⁶

Now for this bold front to our enemies, nothing is wanted beyond the reach of the weakest child of God. No extraordinary holiness—no Christian establishment in experience—nothing but simple, humble faith, "*For I trust in thy word.*" Faith makes this salvation ours, in all its fulness and almighty power; and therefore our confidence "*in the word*" will make us "ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear."⁷ "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that riseth against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."⁸

But how often is our Christian boldness paralyzed by our feeble apprehensions of *the salvation of God!* Clear and full evangelical views are indispensable for the effective exercise of our weighty obligations. Any indistinctness here, from its necessary mixture of self-righteousness and unbelief, obscures the warrant of our personal interest, and therefore hinders that firm grasp of Almighty strength. Coldness and formality also deaden the power of Christian boldness. Much need therefore have we to pray for a realized

¹ 2 Sam. xxii. 5.² Isaiah xlv. 15.³ Job vi. vii. ix.⁴ Ps. lxxxviii.⁵ Micah vii. 8.⁶ Rom. viii. 33—39.⁷ 1 Peter iii. 15.⁸ Isaiah liv. 17.

perception of the freeness, fulness, holiness, and privileges of the Gospel. Much need have we to use our speedy diligence, without delay; our painful diligence, without indulgence; our continual diligence, without weariness; that we be not satisfied with remaining on the skirts of the kingdom; that it be not a matter of doubt, whether we belong to it or not; but that, grace being added to grace, "so an entrance may be ministered to us abundantly into" all its rich consolations and everlasting joys.

43. *And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth: for I have hoped in thy judgments.*

For the sake of the Church and the world, not less than for our own sakes, let us give diligence to clear up our interest in the Gospel, that "the joy of the Lord may be our strength" in his service. The want of personal assurance not only brings a loss to our soul's own experience, but a hindrance to our own usefulness. Not only is our answer feeble to "*him that reproaches us*;" but our attempts to "strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees"² of our brethren are unavailing. The dread of the charge of hypocrisy—the absence of the only "constraining" principle—"the love of Christ,"³ or the indulgence of worldly habits and conversation—stops the utterance of the *word of truth*, and obscures our character as a "saint of God,"⁴ and a witness for his name.⁵ Justly indeed might he punish our unfaithfulness by forbidding us to speak any more in his name; and therefore in deprecating this grievous judgment, the child of God, conscious of guilt, casts himself at the footstool of mercy—"Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth." Not only take it not out of my heart; but let it be ready in my mouth for a confession of my master.

This is a valuable prayer to preserve us from denying Christ in worldly intercourse. Let the whole weight of Christian obligation be deeply felt—faith in the heart, and confession with the mouth⁶—the active principle, and the practical exercise. Should we be content with the dormant principle, where would be the Church—the ordinances—the witness for God in the world? Shall we shrink from the bold confession of him who "despised the shame of the cross for us?"⁷ Would not this imply a distrust of our own testimony—the *word of truth*?

Wisdom is indeed required to know when, as well as what, to speak. There is indeed "a time to keep silence," "and the prudent shall keep silence in that time."⁸ But too often a judicious caution is a self-deluding cover for the real cause of restraint—the want of apprehension of the *Lord's mercy* to the soul. It will always therefore be made to examine, whether it is our cross to be "dumb with silence"—whether, when we "hold our peace even from good, our sorrow is stirred," and our "heart hot within us, and the fire burning."⁹

¹ 2 Peter i. 5—11.

⁴ Psalm cxlv. 10—13.

⁷ Heb. xii. 2.

² Isaiah xxxv. 3.

⁵ See Isaiah xliii. 10.

⁸ Eccl. iii. 7. Amos v. 13.

³ 2 Cor. v. 14.

⁶ Rom. x. 9, 10.

⁹ Psalm xxxix. 2, 3.

Sometimes the Lord may see it needful to straiten our spirits, for the discovery of our weakness, for our deeper humiliation, and more simple dependence on himself. But then will the cry—"Take not the word *utterly* out of my mouth"—be heard and answered. And a word spoken in weakness may be a word of Almighty power to one of the Lord's "little ones." Many opportunities also in our connections with the world will unexpectedly offer for the improvement of the wakeful heart. The common topics of earthly conversation may furnish a channel for heavenly intercourse; so that our communications even with the world may be like Jacob's ladder, whose foot rested upon the earth, but the top reached unto the heavens.¹ And oh! what a relief is it to the burdened conscience, if but a few words can be stammered out for God, even though there are no sensible refreshings of his presence upon the soul!

But in order that *the word of truth* may come out of our mouth, it must be well stored in the heart. "Let then the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom;" that it may be ready for every opportunity of usefulness.² When the heart is full, the mouth will flow.³ When "the heart is inditing a good matter, speaking of the things touching the king," "our tongue will be the pen of a ready writer."⁴ This prayer is the same confidence of faith that was expressed in the preceding verse, "*For I have hoped in thy judgments,*" an acceptable spirit of approach to God, and an earnest of the revival of life and comfort in the Lord's best time and way.

44. *So shall I keep thy law continually, for ever and ever.*

THE heaping up of so many words in this short verse, appears to be the struggle of the soul to express the vehemency of its longings to glorify its Saviour. And indeed the Lord's return to us, unsealing the lips of the dumb, and putting his *word again into our mouth*, brings with it a fresh sense of constraining obligation. This fresh occupation in his praise and service is not only our present privilege, but an antepast of our heavenly employment, when the word will never more "*be taken out of our mouth,*" but we shall "talk of his wondrous works"⁵ "*for ever and ever.*" The defects in the constancy and extent of our obedience (as far as our hearts are alive to the honor of God,) must ever be our grief and burden; and the prospect of its completeness in a better world, is that which renders the anticipation of heaven so delightful. There we shall be blest with suitable feelings, and therefore be enabled to render suitable obedience—even one unbroken consecration of all our powers to his work. Then "*shall we keep his law continually*

¹ Gen. xxviii. 12. "Why do I make any of my visits to any of my neighbors, or countenance their visits unto me? Lord, I desire to let fall something, that may be for the good of the company; even, that more may be known of thee, and done for thee, from what passes in it. And when I propose to ingratiate myself unto any people by the civilities of conversation, it shall be, that I may gain thereby the better advantages to prosecute purposes upon them. In conversation, I would especially lay hold on all advantages to introduce as much as I can of a lovely Christ into the view of all that I come near unto."—*Cotton Mather, Student and Pastor*, pp. 74, 75.

² Col. iii. 16.

³ Matt. xii. 34.

Comp. Ps. cxvi. 10.

⁴ Ps. xlv. 1, 2.

⁵ Verse 27.

for ever and ever." Once admitted to the throne of God, we "shall serve him day and night in his temple,"¹—without sin—without inconstancy,—without weariness,—without end! We speak of heaven; but oh! to be there! To be engaged throughout eternity in the service of love to a God of love! In one day's continuance in the path of obedience even here, in the midst of the defilement which stains our holiest services, how sweetly do the minutes roll away! But to be for ever employed for him, in that place, where "there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth"²—this gives an emphasis and a dignity to the heavenly joy, which may well stamp it as "unspeakable and full of glory."⁴ May we not then encourage the hope, that the Lord is making us meet for heaven, by the strength and constancy of our desires to "*keep the laws of God?*" And is it not evident that heaven itself can afford no real delight to one, who feels the service of God on earth to be irksome? He stands self-excluded by the constitution of his nature, by the necessity of the case. He has no heart for heaven, no taste for heaven, no capacity for the enjoyment of heaven—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still."⁴

Heavenly, gracious Father! who and what are we, that our hearts should be made the unworthy recipients of thy grace? that our wills should be subdued into "the obedience of faith?" and that we should be permitted to anticipate that blessed period, when we shall "*keep thy law continually for ever and ever!*" May this prospect realize the happiness of our present obedience! May he, who has "bought us with a price" for his glory, reign in our hearts, and live upon our lips; that each of us may have his mark upon our foreheads—the seal of his property in us, and of our obligation to him—"Whose I am, and whom I serve!"⁵

45. *And I will walk at liberty; for I seek thy precepts.*

NOT only perseverance but *liberty*, is the fruit of the Lord's mercy to our souls—not the liberty of sin—to do what we please—but of holiness—to do what we ought; the one, the iron bondage of our own will;⁶ the other, the easy yoke of a God of love. It was a fine expression of a heathen, "to serve God is to reign."⁷ Certainly in this service David found the *liberty* of a king. *The precepts of God* were not forced upon him; for he *sought them*. "More to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb."⁸ The way of the Lord,

¹ Rev. vii. 15.

² Ib. xxi. 27.

³ 1 Peter i. 8.

⁴ Rev. xxii. 11.

⁵ Acts xxvii. 23.

⁶ "I gave my will to mine enemy," said Augustine, "and he made a chain, and bound me with it."—Confess. viii. 5.

⁷ "In regno vivimus. Deo servare est regnare."—*Seneca*. When the female martyr Agatha was upbraided, because, being descended of an illustrious parentage, she stooped to mean and humble offices—"Our nobility," she replied, "lies in this; that we are the servants of Christ."—*Bishop Sumner's Evidences*, pp. 359, 360.

⁸ Psalm xix. 10, 11.

which to the ungodly is beset with thorns and briars, is the King's highway of *liberty*. The child of God walks here in the gladness of his heart and the rejoicing of his conscience. Even in "*seeking these precepts*," there is "*liberty*" and enlargement of heart; a natural motion, like that of the sun in his course, "going forth as a bridegroom, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race."¹ What must it be then, to walk in the full enjoyment of *the precepts*! "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." "They shall sing in the ways of the Lord"—"for how great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!"²

Are we then obeying *the precepts* as our duty, or "*seeking*" them as our privilege? Do we complain of the strictness of the law or the corruption of the flesh? Are the *precepts* or our own hearts our burden? Is sin or holiness our bondage? The only way to make religion easy is to be always in it. The glow of spiritual activity, and the healthfulness of Christian *liberty* are only to be found in a persevering and self-denying pursuit of every track of the ways of God—"If ye continue in my word, then ye are my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."³ To have the whole stream of all our thoughts, actions, motives, desires, affections, carried in one undivided current towards God, is the complete and unrestrained influence of his love upon our hearts.

The corrupt and rebellious inclinations will "last"⁴ to the end. But as long as indulgence is denied, conflict excited, and the constant endeavor maintained to "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,"⁵ our liberty is established, even where it is not always enjoyed. Every fresh chain, by which we bind ourselves to the Lord, makes us feel more free.⁶ While, then, they that "promise us liberty are themselves the servants of corruption,"⁷ let us live as the children of God—the heirs of the kingdom—grateful—free—blood-bought souls—remembering the infinite cost, at which our liberty was purchased: and the moment of extreme peril, when we were saved. When the flesh was weak, and the "law weak through the flesh,"⁸ and no resolutions of ours could break us from the yoke of sin—then it was that "Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living;"⁹ "delivering us from the hand of our enemies, that we might serve him without fear."¹⁰ And then indeed do we "*walk at liberty*," when we "break the bands" of all other lords "asunder," and consecrate ourselves entirely to his *precepts*. "*O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.*"¹¹

¹ Psalm xix. 5.

³ John viii. 31, 32, 36.

⁶ Jugum Christi non deterit, sed honestat colla.—Bernard.

⁷ 2 Peter ii. 19. Compare John viii. 34.

⁹ Ib. xiv. 9.

¹¹ Isaiah xxvi. 13. An incident in the history of ancient Rome may furnish an illus-

² 2 Cor. iii. 17. Psalm cxxxviii. 5. Zech. ix. 17.

⁴ Gal. v. 17.

⁵ 2 Cor. x. 5.

⁸ Rom. viii. 3.

¹⁰ Luke i. 74.

46. *I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.*

"*Liberty in walking*" in the Lord's ways will naturally produce boldness in "*speaking*" of them. Compare the conduct of the three unshaken witnesses of the truth before the Babylonish monarch.¹ Mark the difference of the spirit displayed by the Apostles, and especially by Peter, before and after the day of Pentecost.² Look at Stephen before the council,³ and Paul before Felix,⁴ Festus,⁵ and Agrippa.⁶ "God had not given to them the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."⁷ Hear the great Apostle testifying of himself—"I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also,"—at the metropolis of the world, in the face of all opposition and contempt, and at the imminent hazard of my life—"For," says he, "*I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.*"⁸ In the same determination of soul, he exhorts his dear son in the faith—"Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner."⁹ To how many does "the fear of man bring a snare?"¹⁰ Many a good soldier has faced the cannon's mouth with undaunted front, and yet shrunk away with a coward's heart from the reproach of the cross, and been put to the blush even by the mention of the Saviour's name. Far better—the son of man "strengthening you"—to brave the fiery furnace or the den of lions in his service, than like Jonah, by flinching from the cross, incur the sting of conscience and the frown of God.¹¹

Professing Christians! Are we ready to bear our testimony for Jesus, against the sneer and ridicule of the ungodly? We are not likely to "be brought *before kings* and rulers for the Son of Man's sake."¹² Yet no less do we need Divine help and strong faith in withstanding the enmity of a prejudiced relative or scornful neighbor. Young people! you are perhaps in especial danger of being ashamed of your Bible, your religion, your Saviour. You may be brought under the "snare" of the "fear of man," and be tempted to compromise your religion, and to sacrifice your everlasting all from a dread of "the reproach of Christ." But remember him, who for

tration of that full liberty and entireness of heart which forms the act of acceptable surrender to the Lord. When the people of Collatia were negotiating an unconditional capitulation to the Romans, Egerius, on the part of the Romans, inquired of the ambassadors—"Are the people of Collatia in their own power?" When an affirmative answer was given, it was next inquired—"Do you deliver up yourselves—the people of Collatia—your city, your fields, your waters, your boundaries, your temples, your utensils, *all your property*, divine and human, into my power and the power of the Roman people?" "*We surrender all.*" "And so," said he, "I accept you."—*Livy*, Book i. Such may my surrender be to the Lord! Disentangled from every other yoke, under no bonds that ought to bind me, Lord, I offer myself, and all that belongs to me, without exception or reserve, at thy feet. "But who am I, that I should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have I given thee." 1 Chron. xxix. 14.

¹ Dan. iii. 16—18.

² Contrast Matt. xxvi. 56, 69, 75, with Acts ii. iii. iv. v. We can scarcely believe that the same persons are alluded to. But the explanation of the difficulty had been given by anticipation. John vii. 39.

³ Acts vi. vii.

⁴ Ib. xxiv.

⁵ Ib. xxv.

⁶ Ib. xxvi.

⁷ 2 Tim. i. 7.

⁸ Rom. i. 15, 16.

⁹ 2 Tim. i. 8.

¹⁰ Prov. xxix. 25.

¹¹ Dan. iii. 16—18; vi. 16—22, with Jonah i. 1—15.

¹² Luke xxi. 12. Mark xiii. 9.

your sake "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;"¹ and shall the dread of a name restrain you from sharing his reproach, and banish the obligations of love and gratitude from your hearts? Have you forgotten, that you once owned the service of Satan? and will you not be as bold for Christ, as you were for him? Were you once "glorying in your shame;" and will you now be ashamed of your glory? Oh! remember who hath said, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."² Think much and often of this word. Think on this day. Think on the station of "the fearful and unbelieving" on the left hand on that day. Think on their eternal doom.³ What is a prison to hell? What need to pray and tremble! If you are sincere in your determination, and simple in your dependence, then will the "love of Christ constrain you,"⁴ not to a cold, calculating, reluctant service; but to a confession of your Saviour, bold, unfettered, and "faithful even unto death."⁵ Every deviation from the straight path bears the character of being *ashamed* of Christ. How much have you to speak in behalf of *his testimonies*, his ways, his love! When in danger of the influence of the fear of man, look to him for strength. He will give to you—as he gave to Stephen—"a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist."⁶ Thus will you, like them, be strengthened "to profess a good profession before many witnesses."⁷

47. *And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.*

IT is but poor comfort to the believer to be able to talk well to others upon the ways of God, and even to "bear the reproach" of his people, when his own heart is cold, insensible, and dull. But why does he not rouse himself to the active exercise of faith—"I will delight myself in thy commandments?" That which is the burden of the carnal heart is the delight of the renewed soul. The former "is enmity against God; and therefore is not, and cannot be, subject to his law."⁸ The latter can *delight* in nothing else. If the Gospel separates the heart from *sinful* delights, it is only to make room for delights of a more elevated, satisfying, and enduring nature.⁹ Satan indeed generally baits his temptations with that seductive witchery, which the world calls pleasure. But has he engrossed all pleasure into his service? Are there no pleasures besides "the pleasures of sin?" Do the ways of the Lord promise nothing but difficulty and trial? What means then the experience of him, who could "rejoice in them, as much as in all riches," and who "loved them above gold, yea, above fine gold?"¹⁰ The "fatted

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 13.

² Mark viii. 38.

³ Rev. xxi. 8.

⁴ 2 Cor. v. 14.

⁵ Rev. ii. 10.

⁶ Luke xxi. 15, with Acts vi. 10.

⁷ 1 Tim. vi. 12.

⁸ Rom. viii. 7.

⁹ "Delectationes non amittimus, sed mutamus," was the expression of one of the ancients. "I live a voluptuous life," said the excellent Joseph Alleine to his wife; "but it is upon spiritual dainties, such as the world know not, nor taste not of."

¹⁰ Verses 14, 127.

calf" of our Father's house is surely a most gainful exchange for "the husks" of the "far country."¹ The delights of holiness go deeper than sensual pleasures.² The joy of the saint is not that false, polluted, deadly joy, which is all that the worldling knows, and all that he has to look for; but it flows spontaneously from the fountain of living waters, through the pure channel of "the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Nay, so independent is it of any earthly spring, that it never flourishes more than in the desolate wilderness or the sick-bed solitude; so that, "although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, yet we will rejoice in the Lord, we will joy in the God of our salvation."³ The world see what religion takes away, but they see little of what it gives;⁴ else they would reproach—not their own folly—but their own blindness. "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit."⁵

The love and complacency of the soul first fixes on *the commandments*. Then how natural is the flow of *delight in them!* even at the very time that we are "abhorring ourselves in dust and ashes" for our neglect of them; and God never has our hearts, until something of this *delight* is felt and enjoyed. But do we complain of the dulness of our hearts, that restrains this pleasure? Let us seek for a deeper impression of redeeming love. This will be the spring of grateful obedience and holy delight. Let us turn our complaints into prayers, and the Lord will quickly turn them into praises. Let us watch against everything, that would intercept our communion with Jesus. Distance from him must be accompanied with poverty of spiritual enjoyment—"They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life; and in thy light shall we see light."⁶

48. *My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved: and I will meditate in thy statutes.*

SCARCELY any expression seems to be equal to set forth the fervency of David's love and delight in the ways and word of God. Here we find him "*lifting up his hands*" with the gesture of one, who is longing to embrace the object of his desire with both hands and his whole heart.⁷ Perhaps also in "*lifting up his hands unto the commandments,*" he might mean to express his looking upward for assistance to keep them, and to live in them.⁸ But how hum-

¹ Luke xv. 13—24.

² Psalm iv. 7.

³ Hab. iii. 17, 18.

⁴ Cyprian, in one of his Epistles, (ad Donat.) mentions the great difficulty he found in overcoming the false view of the gloom of religion—little suspecting that the cause of the gloom was in himself—not in the gospel. But this is explained, Matt. vi. 23.

⁵ Isa. lxxv. 13, 14.

⁶ Ps. xxxvi. 8, 9.

⁷ See Ib. lxxiii. 4; cxliii. 6.

⁸ See Ib. xxviii. 2.

bling this comparison with ourselves! Alas! how often, from the neglect of this influence of the Spirit of God, do our "hands hang down," instead of being "*lifted up*" in these holy ways! We are too often content with a scanty measure of love: without any sensible "hungering and thirsting after righteousness;" neither able to pray with life and power, nor to hear with comfort and profit, nor to "do good and to communicate" with cheerfulness, nor to meditate with spiritual delight, nor to live for God with zeal and interest, nor to anticipate the endurance of the cross with unflinching resolution—the soul being equally disabled for heavenly communion, and active devotedness. Shall we look for ease under the power of this deadening malady? Let us rather struggle and cry for deliverance from it. Let us subscribe ourselves before God as wretched, and helpless, and guilty. *He can look upon us*, and revive us. Let us then "take hold upon his covenant," and plead, *that he will look upon us*. Let us "put him in remembrance" of the glory of his name, which is much more concerned in delivering us out of this frame, by his quickening grace, than in leaving us, stupid, corrupt, and carnal, in it. Professor! awake: or beg of the Lord to awaken you! For if your cold sleeping heart is contented with the prospect of a heaven hereafter, without seeking for a present foretaste of its joy, it may be a very questionable matter whether heaven will ever be yours.

Delight, however, will exercise itself in an habitual "*meditation in the statutes*."¹ The breathing of the heart will be, "*O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day*."² It is in holy meditation on the word of God, that all the graces of the spirit are manifested. What is the principle of faith, but the reliance of the soul upon the promises of the word? What is the sensation of godly fear, but the soul trembling before the threatenings of God?³ What is the object of hope, but the apprehended glory of God? What is the excitement of desire or love, but longing, endearing contemplations of the Saviour, and of his unspeakable blessings? Hence we can scarcely conceive of the influence of grace separated from spiritual meditation on the word. It is this which, under Divine teaching, draws out its hidden contents, and exhibits them to the soul, as the objects upon which the principles and affections of the Divine life are habitually exercised. Not that any benefit can be expected from meditation, even upon the word of God, as an abstract duty. If not deeply imbued with prayer, it will degenerate into dry speculative study. Without some distinct practical application, it will be unedifying in itself, and unsatisfactory for its important ends—the discerning of the mind of God, and feeding upon the rich provision of the Gospel.

Let it be a matter of daily inquiry, Does my reading of the word of God furnish food for my soul, matter for prayer, direction for conduct? Scriptural study, when entered upon in a prayerful spirit, will never, like many other studies, be unproductive. The mind

¹ See Psalm i. 2.

² Verse 97.

³ Verse 120.

that is engaged in it, is fitly set for bearing fruit; it will "bring forth fruit in due season."¹ Meditation kindles love, as it is the effect of love, "While I was musing, the fire burned."² "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, this man is blessed in his deed."³ But let us take heed, that the root of religion in the soul is not cankered by the indulgence of secret sin. The largest supply of Christian ordinances will fail to refresh us, except the heart be kept right with God in simplicity of faith, love, and diligence in the service of Christ.

Come then, Christian, let us set our hearts to a vigorous, delighting devotedness to *the statutes of our God*. To regard *some* of them, would be to obey our own will, not God's. Let us *lift up our hands to them all*. How shadowy is the joy of speculative contemplation, if it does not draw the heart to practical exercise! Let faith return our obligations in the full apprehension of the Lord's mercy. And then will love constrain us to nothing less than "a living sacrifice"⁴ to his service. If the professor sleeps in notional godliness, let us employ our active *meditation*, in searching for the mine that lies not on the surface, but which never fails to enrich diligent, patient, persevering labor.⁵

PART VII.

49. *Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.*

WHAT is faith? It is *hope upon God's word*. The warrant of faith is therefore *the word*. The spring of faith is he that *causeth us to hope*. He has not forgotten—he cannot forget his *word*. But he permits—nay, commands *his servants* to remind him of it,⁶ in order to exercise their faith, diligence, and patience. Often indeed "hope deferred maketh the heart sick."⁷ But it is not needless delay⁸—not ignorance of the fittest time⁹—not forgetfulness¹⁰—not changeableness¹¹—not weakness.¹² Meanwhile, however, constantly plead the promise—*Remember the word unto thy servant*. This is the proper use of the promises, as "arguments, wherewith to fill our mouths, when we order our cause before God."¹³ When thus pleaded with the earnestness and humility of faith, they will be found to be the blessed realities of unchanging love.

Now—have not circumstances of Providence, or the distinct ap-

¹ Psalm i. 2, 3. ² Ib. xxix. 3. ³ James i. 25. ⁴ Rom. xi. xii. 1. ⁵ Prov. ii. 4, 5.

⁶ Isa. lxii. 6, M. R.

⁷ Prov. xiii. 13.

⁸ Hab. iii. 3.

⁹ Isa. xxx. 18.

¹⁰ Psalm cxii. 5.

¹¹ Mal. iii. 6.

¹² 1 Sam. xv. 29.

¹³ Job xxiii. 4.

plication of the Spirit, made some words of God especially precious to your soul? Such words are thus made your own, to be laid up against some future time of trial, when you may "put your God in remembrance"¹ of them. Apply this exercise of faith to such a word as this, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."² Then plead your interest in it as a coming sinner, "Lord, *I hope in this thy word.*" "*Thou hast caused me to hope*" in it. "*Remember this word unto thy servant.*" Thus is prayer grounded upon the promise, which it forms into a prevailing argument, and sends back to heaven; nothing doubting, but that it will be verified in God's best time and way.³

Take another case. God has engaged himself to be the God of the seed of believers. His sacramental ordinance is the seal of this promise.⁴ The believer brings his child to this ordinance, as the exercise of his faith upon the faithfulness of God. Let him *daily* put his finger upon this promise, *Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.* This is, as Augustine said of his mother, 'bringing before God his own handwriting.' Will he not *remember his word*? Faith may be tried, perhaps long tried. "But he abideth faithful. He cannot deny himself."⁵ Faith trusts—not what the eye sees, but what the word promises.

Again—Have we ever found *God's word hoped on*, a covering and strength against besetting sin? This will surely be an encouragement to cry under the same temptation, *Remember thy word*, "He who hath delivered, doth deliver, and will even to the end deliver."⁶ He "hath done great things for us." And is not this an earnest of continued mercy? "*Because thou hast been my help*, therefore under the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."⁷ Thus may we confidently receive a promise as the distinct message to our soul, where we are conscious of a readiness to receive the whole word as the rule of our life. And does it not set an edge upon prayer *to eye a promising God*, and to consider his promises, not as hanging in the air, without any definite direction or meaning, but as individually spoken and belonging to myself as a child and *servant of God*? This is the experience and comfort of the life of faith. This unfolds the true secret of living to God; ending at last with the honorable death-bed testimony, "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth; and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things, which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you; and not one thing hath failed thereof."⁸

¹ Isaiah xliii. 26.

² John vi. 37.

³ We may observe Jacob making precisely this use of the word of promise to great advantage, at a time of personal extremity. Gen. xxxii. 9, 10, 12, with xxxi. 3, 13, xxviii. 13—15. Was not this in fact pleading—"Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope?" Compare also verse 38 of this Psalm.

⁴ Gen. xvii. 7, 10, with Acts ii. 38, 39.

⁵ 2 Tim. ii. 13.

⁶ 2 Cor. i. 10.

⁷ Psalm lxiii. 7.

⁸ Joshua xxiii. 14.

50. *This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me.*

DAVID was encouraged to plead *the word* of promise in prayer, from the recollection of its "*comfort in his affliction.*" Never, indeed, are we left unsupported in such a time, or called to drink a cup of unmingled tribulation. In the moments of our bitterest sorrow, how are we compelled to stand amazed at the tenderness, which is daily and hourly exercised toward us! We have always some word exactly suited to our affliction, and which we could not have understood without it; and "a word" *thus* "*spoken in due season, how good is it!*" One word of God, sealed to the heart, infuses more sensible relief, than ten thousand words of man. When therefore *the word* assures us of the presence of God in *affliction*;² of his continued pity and sympathy in his most severe dispensations;³ and of their certain issue to our everlasting good;⁴ must not we say of it, "*This is our comfort in our affliction?*" How does the Saviour's love stream forth from this channel on every side; imparting life, refreshment, and strength to those, who but for this *comfort* would have "*fainted,*"⁵ and "*perished in their affliction!*"⁶ This indeed was the end, for which the Scriptures were written;⁷ and such power of consolation have they sometimes administered to the afflicted saint, that tribulation has almost ceased to be a trial, and the retrospect has been the source of thankful recollection.

But those only, who have felt the *quickening power of the word*, can realize its consolations. Be thankful, then, reader, if, when dead in sins, it "*quickened you.*"⁸ and, when sunk in trouble, once and again it has revived you.⁹ Yet think not, that it is any innate power of its own, that works so graciously for you. No. The exhibition of the Saviour is the spring of life and consolation. It is because it "*testifies of him,*"¹⁰ "*the consolation of Israel,*"¹¹—"*afflicted in all our afflictions,*"¹²—and never failing to uphold with "*grace sufficient for us.*"¹³ It is not, however, the word without the Spirit, nor the Spirit generally without the word; but the Spirit by the word—first putting life into the word,¹⁴ and then by the word quickening the soul. The word then is only the instrument. The Spirit is the Almighty agent. Thus the work is the Lord's; and nothing is left for us, but self-renunciation and praise.

¹ Prov. xv. 23. "I will show you a privilege that others want, and you have in this case. Such as are in prosperity, and are filled with earthly joys, and increased with children and friends; though the word of God is indeed written for their instruction, yet to you who are in trouble, and from whom the Lord hath taken many children, and whom he hath otherwise exercised, there are some chapters, some particular promises in the word of God, made in an especial manner, which would never have been yours, so as they now are, if you had had your portion in this world like others. It is no small comfort that God hath written some scriptures to you, which he hath not to others. Read these, and think God is like a friend, who sendeth a letter to a whole house and family, but who speaketh in his letter to some by name, that are dearest to him in the house."—*Rutherford's Letters.*

² Isa. xliii. 1, 2.

³ Exod. iii. 7.

⁴ Rom. viii. 28.

⁵ Psalm xxvii. 13.

⁶ Verse 92.

⁷ Rom. xv. 4.

⁸ James i. 18.

¹ Peter i. 23.

⁹ Verses 81, 82.

¹⁰ John v. 39.

¹¹ Luke ii. 25.

¹² Isa. lxiii. 9.

¹³ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

¹⁴ John vi. 63.

51. *The proud have had me greatly in derision : yet I have not declined from thy law.*

THE scorn of an ungodly world is one of the *afflictions*, which realize to us *the comfort of the word*. And this is a trial, from which no exemption is to be expected—"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."¹ Not even David—though a king—a man of wisdom and prudence, and therefore not likely to provoke unnecessary offence, and whose character and rank might be expected to command respect—not even was he shielded from "*the derision of the proud*" on account of the profession and service of his God.² Thus it ever was, and ever will be. Faith in the doctrine of Christ, and conformity to the strict commandments of the Gospel, must expose us to the taunts of the unbeliever and the worldling. Yet, where the heart is right with God, the "*derision of the proud*," instead of forcing us to "*decline from the law of God*," will strengthen our adherence to it. David answered the bitter "*derision of Michal*" with a stronger resolution to abide by his God—"I will yet be more vile than thus."³ He counted it his glory, his duty, his joy. None, however, but a believer knows what it is to bear this cross; and none but a real believer can bear it. It is one of the touchstones of sincerity, the application of which has often been the means of "*separating the precious from the vile*," and has unmasked the self-confident professor to his own confusion. Oh! how many make a fair profession, and appear "*good soldiers of Jesus Christ*," until the hour of danger proves them deserters, and they reap only the fruits of their self-confidence in their own confusion!

It is, therefore, of great importance to those who are just setting out in the warfare, to be well armed with the word of God. It kept David steadfast amidst "*the derision of the proud*," and it will keep young Christians from being frightened or overcome by the sneer of an ungodly world. But that it may " *dwell in us richly in all wisdom*,"⁴ and be suited to our own case, it will be well, under circumstances of reproach, to acquaint ourselves with the supporting promises and encouragements to suffer for righteousness' sake.⁵ Above all, the contemplation of the great sufferer himself—meeting this poignant trial in meekness,⁶ compassion, and prayer⁷—will exhibit "*a refuge from the storm, and a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as the storm against the wall*."⁸ The mere professor knows not this refuge; he possesses not this armor; so that "*when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately he is offended*."⁹ Blessed

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 12. Comp. 1 Cor. iv. 13.

² Psalm xxxv. 15, 16; cxxiii. 3, 4.

³ 2 Sam. vi. 20—22.

⁴ Col. iii. 16.

⁵ Such is the benediction of the Saviour, Luke vi. 22, 23, confirmed by the recorded experience of the Lord's most favored servants, the apostles, Acts v. 41. Paul especially, 2 Cor. xii. 10; Col. i. 24,—the disciples of Thessalonica, 1 Thess. i. 6,—the Hebrew Christians, Heb. x. 34.

⁶ Psalm xxii. 6—8. Luke xxiii. 35. 1 Peter ii. 23.

⁷ Luke xxiii. 34.

⁸ Isaiah xxv. 4.

⁹ Mark iv. 17.

be God! the weapons of our warfare are drawn from the Divine armory; and therefore, depending on the grace, and following the example, of Jesus, we suffer as the way to victory—the road to an everlasting crown.

52. *I remember thy judgments of old, O Lord; and have comforted myself.*

THE Lord's dealings with his people were a frequent subject of meditation to the Psalmist,¹ and now were his present support under "the scourge of the tongue."² Evidently they are put upon record for the encouragement of future generations.³ We are ready to imagine something peculiar in our own case, and to think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try us, "as though some strange thing happened unto" us; but when we "*remember the Lord's judgments of old,*" with his people, we "*comfort ourselves*" in the assurance, that "the same afflictions are accomplished in our brethren, that have been in the world;"⁴ and that "as the sufferings of Christ have abounded in them, so their consolation also abounded by Christ."⁵ They also encountered the same "*derision of the proud,*" and always experienced the same support from the faithfulness of their God. We do not sufficiently consider the mercy and gracious wisdom of God, in occupying so much of his written word with the records of his "*judgments of old.*" One class will pay a prominent attention to the preceptive, another to the doctrinal, parts of Revelation—each forgetting that the historical records comprise a full and striking illustration of both, and have always proved most supporting grounds of consolation to the Lord's people. The important design in casting so large a portion of the small volume of Revelation into a historical form, is every way worthy of its Author. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we through *patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope;*"⁶ and how admirably adapted the means are to the end, the diligent student in the Scripture-field will bear ample witness. Wilfully therefore to neglect the historical portion of the sacred volume, from the idea of confining our attention to what we deem the more spiritual parts of Scripture—would show a sad deficiency of spiritual apprehension, and deprive ourselves of the most valuable instruction, and most abundant comfort. This neglect would exclude us from one eminent means of increasing "patience," in the example of those "who through faith and patience inherit the promises;" of receiving "comfort," in the experience of the faithfulness of God manifested in every age to his people; and of enlivening our "hope," in marking the happy issue of the "patience of the saints," and the heavenly support administered unto them.⁷ So far, therefore, are we from being little interested in the scriptural records of past ages,

¹ Psalm. lxxvii. 5, 11, 12; cxliii. 5.

² Job v. 21.

³ Psalm xlv. 1—3; lxxviii. 3—8; cv. 5, 6; cxlv. 4. Joel i. 3.

⁴ 1 Peter iv. 12; v. 9.

⁵ 2 Cor. i. 5.

⁶ Rom. xv. 4.

⁷ In this view, the recollection of the Lord's judgments of old "puts a new song into the mouth" of the Church, of "thanksgiving unto her God." Isaiah xxv. 1—4.

that it is evident, that the sacred historians, as well as the prophets, "ministered not unto themselves, but unto us, the things which are now reported."¹

Let us select one or two instances as illustrative of this subject. Why were the records of the deluge, and of the overthrow of the cities of the plain, preserved, but as exhibitions to the Church, that "the Lord"—the Saviour of Noah, the eight persons, and the deliverer of just Lot—"knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished?"² What a source of *comfort* then to the tempted people of God is the "*remembrance of these judgments of old!*" And thus the Church remembers the wonderful overthrow of the Egyptians, and the consequent deliverance of ancient Israel, as a ground of assurance and expectation of the same grand display of Divine faithfulness and love under similar trials. And if we instance the wonderful history of the overthrow of the Egyptians, and the consequent deliverance of God's ancient people, we may continually observe the Church recollecting this interposition as a ground of assurance, that under similar circumstances of trial, the same illustrious displays of Divine faithfulness and love may be confidently expected. She looks back upon what the "arm of the Lord hath done in ancient days, and in the generation of old," as the pattern of what he ever would be, and ever would do, for his purchased people.³ Thus also God himself recalls to our mind this overthrow and deliverance as a ground of present encouragement and support, "*According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things*"⁴—and the Church echoes back this remembrance in the expression of her faith, gratitude, and expectation for spiritual blessings: "*He will subdue our iniquities! and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*"⁵ Such is the interesting use that may be made of the historical parts of Scripture. Such is the "*comfort*" to be derived from the "*remembrance of the Lord's judgments of old!*" And is not the recollection of his "*judgments of old*" with ourselves, productive of the same support? Does not the retrospect of his dealings with our own souls serve to convince us, that "all his paths are mercy and truth?"⁶ And that the assurance is therefore warranted alike by experience and by Scripture, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."⁷

53. *Horror hath taken hold upon me, because of the wicked that forsake thy law.*

THE *remembrance of the Lord's judgments of old*, while it brings *comfort* to his people as regards themselves, stirs up a poignancy of compassionate feeling for the ungodly. And indeed to a feeling and reflecting mind, the condition of the world must excite commiseration and concern! A "whole world lying in wicked-

¹ 1 Peter i. 12.

² 2 Peter ii. 5—9.

³ Isaiah li. 9—11.

⁴ Micah vii. 15.

⁵ Ib. vii. 19.

⁶ Psalm xxv. 10.

⁷ Rom. viii. 28.

ness!"¹ lying therefore in ruins! the image of God effaced! the presence of God departed! "*Horror hath taken hold of me!*" to see *the law* of Him, who gave being to the world, so utterly *forsaken!* so much light and love shining from heaven in vain! The earthly heart cannot endure that any restraint should be imposed; much less that any constraint, even of love, should be employed to change its bias, and turn it back to its God. Are you then a believer? then you will be most tender of the honor of the law of God. Every stroke at his law you will feel as a stroke at your own heart. Are you a believer? then will you consider every man as your brother; and weep to see so many of them around you, crowding the broad road to destruction, and perishing as the miserable victims of their own deceivings. The prospect on every side is, as if God were cast down from his throne, and the creatures of his hand were murdering their own souls.

But how invariably does a languor respecting our own eternal interest affect the tenderness of our regard for the honor of our God; so that we can look at "*the wicked that forsake God's law*" with comparative indifference! Awful indeed is the thought, that it ever can be with us a small matter, that multitudes are sinking! going down into perdition! with the name of Christ—under the seal of baptism—partakers of the means of Gospel grace—yet perishing! Not indeed that we are to yield to such a feeling of "*horror*" as would paralyze all exertion on their behalf. For do we owe them no duty—no prayer—no labor?² Shall we look upon souls hurrying on with such dreadful haste to unutterable, everlasting torments; and permit them to rush on blinded, unawakened, unalarmed! If there is a "*horror*" to see a brand apparently fitting for the fire, will there not be a wrestling endeavor to pluck that brand out of the fire? Have we quite forgotten in our own case the fearful terrors of an unconverted state—the Almighty power of wrath and justice armed against us—the thunder of that voice—"Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord?"³ Oh! if the love of the Saviour and the love of souls were reigning with more mighty influence in our hearts, how much more devoted should we be in our little spheres of labor! how much more enlarged in our supplications, until all the kingdom of Satan were subject to the obedience of the Son of God, and conquered by the force of his omnipotent love!

But if the spirit of David, renewed but in part, was thus filled with *horror* in the contemplation of the wicked, what must have been the affliction—what the intensity of His sufferings, "who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"⁴—yea, "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity"⁵—during thirty-three years of continued contact with a world of sin? What shall we say of the condescension of his love, in wearing "the likeness of sinful flesh"⁶

¹ 1 John v. 19.

² Acts xvii. 16—18.

³ Heb. x. 30, with Deut. xxxii. 35.

⁴ Heb. vii. 26.

⁵ Hab. i. 13. Compare Psalm v. 5.

⁶ Rom. viii. 3.

—dwelling among sinners—yea, “receiving sinners, and eating with them!”¹

Blessed Spirit! impart to us more of “the mind that was in Christ Jesus!” that the law of God may be increasingly precious in our eyes, and that we may be “exceedingly jealous for the Lord God of Hosts!” Help us by thy gracious influence, to plead with sinners for God, and to plead for sinners with God!

54. *Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.*

COME, Christian pilgrim, and beguile your wearisome journey heavenward by “singing the Lord’s song in this strange land.”² With “*the statutes of God*” in your hand and in your heart, you are furnished with a song for every step of your way—“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”³ How delightfully does this song bring before you Him, who having laid down his life for you, engages himself as your Provider, your Keeper, your Guide, your faithful and unchangeable friend! Such a song therefore will smoothe your path, and reconcile you to the many inconveniences of the way; while the recollection, that this is only “*the house of your pilgrimage*” and not your home; and that “there remaineth a rest for the people of God,”⁴ will support the exercise of faith and patience to the end. How striking the contrast between *the wicked that forsake the law*, and the Christian pilgrim, who makes it the subject of his daily song, and the source of his daily comfort! Yes, these same *statutes*, which are the yoke and burden of the ungodly, lead the true servant of the Lord from pleasure to pleasure; and, cherished by their vigorous influence, his way is made easy and prosperous. Evidently, therefore, our knowledge and delight in the Lord’s statutes will furnish a decisive test of our real state before him.

But what reason have we every moment to guard against the debasing, stupefying influence of the world, which makes us forget the proper character of a pilgrim! And what an habitual conflict must be maintained with the sloth and aversion of a reluctant heart to maintain our progress in the journey towards Zion! Reader! have you entered upon a pilgrim’s life? Then what is your solace and refreshment on the road? It is dull, heavy, wearisome, to be a pilgrim without a “*song*.” And yet it is only the blessed experience of *the Lord’s statutes* that will tune our “*song*.” “If therefore you have tasted that the Lord is gracious,”⁵ if “he

¹ Luke xv. 2.

² Ps. cxxxvii. 4.

³ Ps. xxiii.

⁴ Heb. iv. 9.

⁵ 1 Pet. ii. 3.

has thus put a new song into your mouth,"¹ oh! do not suffer any carelessness or neglect to rob you of this heavenly anticipation. And, that your lips be not found mute, seek to keep your heart in tune. Seek to maintain a lively contemplation of the place whither you are going—of Him, who as your "forerunner is for you entered"² thither—and of the prospect, that, having "prepared a place for you, he will come again, and take you to himself; that where he is, there you may be also."³ In this spirit, and with these hopes before you, you may take up your song—"O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing, and give praise. I will bless the Lord at all times—his praise shall continually be in my mouth."⁴ Thus may you go on your *pilgrimage*, "singing in the ways of the Lord,"⁵ and commencing a song below, which in the world of praise above, shall never, never cease.⁶

55. *I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law.*

How did this man of God live in the statutes of God! In the day they were his *pilgrim song*—in the night his happy meditation.⁷ And truly if we can ever spend the waking moments of the night with God, "the darkness is no darkness with us, but the night shineth as the day." Many a tried believer has found this cordial for the restlessness of a wakeful night more restorative to the quiet and health of his earthly frame, than the most sovereign specifics of the medical world. "So he giveth his beloved sleep."⁸ And if in any "*night*" of affliction we feel the hand of the Lord grievous to us, do we not find in "*the remembrance of the Lord*" a never-failing support? What does our darkness arise from, but from our forgetfulness of God, blotting out for awhile the lively impressions of his tender care, his unchanging faithfulness, and his mysterious methods of working his gracious will? And to bring up as it were from the grave, the *remembrance of God's name*, as manifested in his promises, and in the dispensation of his love; this is indeed the "light that is sown for the righteous,"⁹ and which "springeth up out of darkness."¹⁰ It is to eye the character of the Lord as All-wise to appoint, Almighty to secure, All-compassionate to sympathize and support. It is to recollect him as a "father pitying his children;"¹¹ as a "friend that loveth at all times,"¹² and that "sticketh closer than a brother."¹³ And even in those seasons of depression, when unwatchfulness or indulgence of sin have brought the darkness of night upon the soul, though "*the remembrance of the name of the Lord*" may be grievous, yet it opens the way to consolation. It tells us, that there is a way made for our return; that "the Lord waiteth, that he may be gracious;"¹⁴ and that in the first step of our return to our father, we shall find him full of mercy to his backsliding children.¹⁵ Thus, though "weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning."¹⁶

¹ Ps. xl. 3.

² Heb. vi. 20.

³ John xiv. 2, 3.

⁴ Ps. cviii. 1; xxxiv. 1.

⁵ Ib. cxxxviii. 5.

⁶ Rev. iv. 8.

⁷ Ps. lxiii. 5, 6.

⁸ Ib. cxvii. 2.

⁹ Ib. xcvi. 11.

¹⁰ Ib. cxii. 4.

¹¹ Ib. ciii. 13.

¹² Prov. xvii. 17.

¹³ Ib. xviii. 24.

¹⁴ Isa. xxx. 18.

¹⁵ See Luke xv. 20—24.

¹⁶ Ps. xxx. 5.

Study the Lord's revelation of his own name, and what more full perception can we conceive of its support in the darkest midnight of tribulations? "And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him, (Moses,) and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed—'The Lord, and the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.'" Can we wonder that such a name as this should be exhibited as a ground of trust? "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe." "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee."² Even our suffering Lord appears to have derived support from "*the remembrance of the name of the Lord in the night*" of desertion—"O my God, I cry in the day-time, and thou hearest not; and in the night-season, and am not silent. *But thou art holy*, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel."³ And from the experience of this source of consolation, we find the tempted Saviour directing his tempted people to the same support—"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him *trust in the name of the Lord*, and stay upon his God."⁴

The main principles of the Gospel are involved in this *remembrance of the Lord's name*. Memory is the storehouse, in which the substance of our *knowledge* is treasured up. Recollections without *faith* are shadowy notions. But we have confidence that our God in himself—and as engaged to us—is all that the Bible declares him to be. How vast then are our obligations to his dear Son—the only medium by which his *name* could be known or *remembered*—"who hath" so "declared him!"⁵ And there is the spring of practical religion. We shall "*keep his law*," when we "*remember his name*." A sense of our obligations will impel us forward in diligence, heavenly-mindedness, and self-devotedness in our appointed sphere. Obedience will partake far more of the character of privilege than of duty, when an enlightened knowledge of God is the principle of action.

56. *This I had, because I kept thy precepts.*

How is it, believer, that you are enabled to "*sing of the Lord's statutes*"—and to "*remember his name*?" *This you have, because you keep his precepts*. Thus you are able to tell the world, that "in keeping his commandments there is great reward"⁶—that the "work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever."⁷ Christian! let your testimony be clear and decided—that ten thousand worlds cannot bestow the happiness of one day's devotedness to the service of your

¹ Exod. xxxiv. 5—7.

² Isaiah l. 10.

³ Psalm xix. 11.

⁴ Prov. xviii. 10. Ps. ix. 10.

⁵ John i. 18; also xiv. 6. Matt. xi. 27.

⁷ Isaiah xxxii. 17.

³ Ps. xxii. 2, 3.

Lord. For is it not in this path that you realize fulness of joy in "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ?" "He that hath *my commandments*, and *keepeth* them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will *manifest myself* to him—my Father will love him; and *we will come* unto him, and make our abode with him."¹ If you were walking more closely with God in "the obedience of faith," the world would never dare to accuse religion as the source of melancholy and despondency. No man has any right to the hope of happiness in a world of tribulation, but he that seeks it in the favor of his God. Nor can any enjoy this favor, except as connected, in the exercise of faith, with conformity to the will, and delight in the law, of his God. Thus not only are "the statutes of the Lord right," but they "rejoice the heart."² There is a sweetness and satisfaction in the work, as well as a good flowing out of it—a current as well as a consequent privilege—cheering the soul in the act of exercise, just as the senses are regaled at the very instant with the object of their gratification.

But let us remark how continually David was enriching his treasury of spiritual experience with some fresh view of the dealings of God with his soul; some answer to prayer, or some increase of consolation, which he records for his own encouragement, and for the use of the Church of God. Let us seek to imitate him in this respect; and we shall often be enabled to say as he does, "*This I had*"—this comfort I enjoyed—this support in trouble—this remarkable manifestation of his love—this confidence I was enabled to maintain—not this I hoped for—but "*this I had*"—it was made my own, "*because I kept thy precepts.*" And how important, in the absence of spiritual enjoyment, to examine, "is there not a cause?" and what is the cause? Have not "strangers devoured my strength; and I knew it not?"³ Is the Lord "with me as in months past?"⁴—with me in my closet?—with me in my family?—with me at my table?—with me in my daily employments and intercourse with the world? When I hear the faithful people of God telling of his love, and saying, "*This I had*," must I not, if unable to join their cheerful acknowledgment, trace it to my unfaithful walk, and say, "*This I had*" not, because I have failed in obedience to thy precepts; because I have been careless and self-indulgent; because I have slighted thy love; because I have "grieved thy Holy Spirit," and forgotten to ask for the "old paths, that I might walk therein, and find rest to my soul?"⁵ Oh let this scrutiny and recollection of our ways realize the constant need of the finished work of Jesus, as our ground of acceptance, and source of strength. This will bring healing, restoration, increasing devotedness, tenderness of conscience, circumspection of walk, and a determination not to rest, until we can make this grateful acknowledgment our own. At the same time, instead of boasting that

¹ John xiv. 21, 23, with 1 John i. 3, 4; iii. 24.

³ Hosea vii. 9.

⁴ Job xxix. 2.

² Psalm xix. 8.

⁵ Jer. vi. 16.

our own arm, our own diligence, or holiness, "have gotten us" into this favor, we shall cast all our attainments at the feet of Jesus, and crown him Lord of all for ever.

PART VIII.

57. *Thou art my portion, O Lord; I have said that I would keep thy words.*

MAN, as a dependent being, must be possessed of some portion. He cannot live upon himself. He must also have a large portion, because the powers and capacities to be filled are large. If he has not a satisfying portion, he is a wretched empty creature. But where and how shall he find this portion? "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!"¹ Oh! the goodness of the Lord, in having offered himself as *the portion* of an unworthy sinner, and having engaged to employ his perfections for his happiness! Oh! the folly, and madness, and guilt, of the sinner, in choosing his "portion in this life;"² as if there were no God on the earth, no way of access to him, or no happiness to be found in him! That such madness should be found in the heart of man, is a most affecting illustration of his departure from God; but that *God's own people* should commit these two evils—forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out broken cisterns for themselves—is the fearful astonishment of heaven itself.³

But we cannot know and enjoy God as our *portion*, except as he has manifested himself in his dear Son. And in the knowledge and enjoyment of him, can we envy those, who "in their lifetime receive their good things,"⁴ and therefore have nothing more to expect? Never indeed does the poverty of the worldling's portion appear more striking than when contrasted with the enjoyment of a child of God⁵—"Soul," said the rich fool, "thou hast much goods laid up for many years." But God said, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee."⁶ Augustine's prayer was, "Lord, give me thyself!"⁷ And thus the believer exults, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire but thee. Return unto thy rest, O my soul. The Lord himself is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup. Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord who hath given me counsel."⁸

¹ Psalm iv. 6.

⁴ Luke xvi. 25; vi. 24.

⁷ Da mihi te, Domine.

² Ib. xvii. 14.

⁵ Comp. Psalm xvii. 14, 15.

⁸ Psalm lxxiii. 25; cxvi. 7; xvi. 5—7.

³ Jer. ii. 12, 13.

⁶ Luke xii. 19, 20.

Elsewhere the believer makes this confession to himself—"The Lord is my portion—*saith my soul.*"¹ Here, as if to prove his sincerity, he "lifts up his face unto God."²—"Thou art my portion, O Lord." And surely the whole world cannot weigh against the comfort of this Christian confidence. For it is as impossible, that his own people should ever be impoverished, as that his own perfections should moulder away. But a portion implies not a source of ordinary pleasure, but of rest and satisfaction, such as leaves nothing else to be desired. Thus *the Lord* can never be enjoyed, even by his own children—except *as a portion*—not only above all, but in the place of all. Other objects indeed may be subordinately loved; but of none but himself must we say—"He is *altogether lovely.*"³ "In all things he must have the pre-eminence"³—one with the Father in our affections, as in his own subsistence.⁵ The moment that any rival is allowed to usurp the throne of the heart, we open the door to disappointment and unsatisfied desires.

But if we take the Lord as our "*portion,*" we must take him as our king. "*I have said*—this is my deliberate resolution,—*that I would keep thy words.*" Here is the Christian complete—taking *the Lord* as his "*portion,*" and his *word* as his rule. And what energy for holy devotedness flows from the enjoyment of this our heavenly *portion!* Thus "delighting ourselves in the Lord, he gives us our heart's desire;"⁶ and every desire identifies itself with his service. All that we are and all that we have, are his; cheerfully surrendered as his right, and willingly employed in his work. Thus do we evidence our interest in his salvation; for "Christ became the *author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*"⁷

Reader! inquire—was my choice of this Divine *portion* considerate, free, unreserved? Am I resolved that it shall be steadfast and abiding? that death itself shall not separate me from the enjoyment of it? Am I ready to receive a Sovereign as well as a Saviour?⁸ Oh! let me have a whole Christ for my *portion!* Oh! let him have a whole heart for his possession. Oh! let me call nothing mine but Him.

58. *I entreated thy favor with my whole heart; be merciful unto me according to thy word.*

DELIGHT in the Lord as our "*portion,*" naturally leads us to "*entreat his favor*" as "*life,*"⁹ and "*better than life,*"¹⁰ to our souls. And if we have "*said, that we would keep his words,*" we shall still "*entreat his favor*" to strengthen and encourage us in his way. We shall "*entreat it with our whole hearts,*" as though we felt our infinite need of it, and were determined to wrestle for it in Jacob's spirit—"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."¹¹ If we have known what unspeakable happiness it is to be brought into the *favor* of God, "by the blood of Christ;"¹² and if "by him also

¹ Lam. iii. 24.

² John xxi. 17. Job xxii. 26.

³ Cant. v. 16.

⁴ Col. i. 18.

⁵ John x. 30.

⁶ Psalm xxxvii. 4.

⁷ Heb. v. 9.

⁸ See Acts v. 31.

⁹ Psalm xxx. 5.

¹⁰ Ib. lxiii. 3.

¹¹ Gen. xxxii. 26.

¹² Eph. ii. 13.

we have access unto that grace wherein we stand,"¹ how shall we prize the sense of Divine *favor*, the light of our Father's countenance! We shall never be weary of this source of daily enjoyment. It is to us as the light of the sun, which shineth every day with renewed and unabated pleasure. We "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."² Mercy, however, is the source of that "*favor which we entreat*;" and the word is the warrant of our expectation—"Be merciful unto us, according to thy word." As sinners, we need this "*favor*." As believers, we "*entreat*" it in the assurance that praying breath, as the breath of faith, will not be spent in vain. Any indulged indolence, or neglect, or unfaithfulness—relaxing our diligence, and keeping back the "*whole heart*" from God—will indeed never fail to remove the sunshine from the soul. But the blood of Christ still opens the way of return to the backslider, even though he may have wandered, as it were, to the ends of the earth. For "if *from thence* thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with *all thine heart and all thy soul*."³ "*A whole heart*," in seeking the Lord, is the seal of the Lord's heart in returning to us—"I will rejoice over them," saith he, "to do them good: and I will plant them in this land assuredly, *with my whole heart and with my whole soul*."⁴

Reader! if you are a child of God, *the favor of God* will be to you the "one thing needful." In other things, you will not venture to choose for yourself; "for who knoweth what is good for man in this life?"⁵ But in this choice you will be decided. This grand, incomparable desire will fill your heart. This will be to you as the portion of ten thousand worlds. Nothing will satisfy besides.

59. *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.*

THE Psalmist's determination, lately mentioned, to *keep God's word*, was not a hasty impulse, but a considerate resolve, the result of much *thinking on his former ways* of sin and folly. How many, on the other hand, seem to pass through the world into eternity without a serious "*thought on their ways!*" Multitudes live for the world—forget God and die! This is their history. What their state is, is written as with a sunbeam in the word of truth—"the wicked shall be turned into hell, and *all the nations that forget God*."⁶ When "no man repenteth him of his wickedness, saying, *What have I done?*"⁷—this banishing of reflection is the character and ruin of an unthinking world. Perhaps one serious thought might be the new birth of the soul to God—the first step of the way to heaven. For when a man is arrested by the power of grace, he is as one awaking out of sleep, lost in solemn and serious thought,—*What am I?*⁸ where am I? what have I been?

¹ Rom. v. 1, 2.

² Ib. v. 11.

³ Deut. iv. 29.

⁴ Jer. xxxii. 41.

⁵ Eccl. vi. 12.

⁶ Psalm ix. 17.

⁷ Jer. viii. 6.

⁸ How utterly unmeaning was the celebrated aphorism of antiquity, "Know thyself," until explained and illustrated by the light of Revelation!

what have I been doing? I have a soul, which is my everlasting all—yet a soul without a Saviour—lost—undone. What is my prospect for its happiness? Behind me is a world of vanity, an empty void. Before me a fearful unknown eternity. Within me an awakened conscience, to remind me of an angry God, and a devouring hell. If I stay here, I perish; if I go forward, I perish; if I return home to my offended Father, I can but perish.¹ The resolution is formed, “I will arise,”² and fight my way through all difficulties and discouragements to my Father’s house.³ Thus does every prodigal child of God “come to himself;” and this his first step of return to his God⁴ involves the whole work of repentance. The wanderer *thinks on his own ways, and turns his feet unto the testimonies of his God*; witnessing, to his joyful surprise, every hindrance removed, the way marked with the blood of his Saviour, and his Father’s smiles in this way welcoming his return homeward. This *turn is the practical exercise of a genuine faith*; and “because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live—he shall not die!”⁴

But this considerate exercise is needed not only upon the first instance *into the ways of God*, but in every successive step of our path. It will form the habit of daily “communion with our own heart;”⁵ without which, disorder and confusion will bewilder our steps. Probably David did not know how far his feet had backslidden from *the ways of his God*, until this serious consideration of his state brought conviction to his soul—so imperceptible is the declining of the heart from God! Nor is it a few transient thoughts or resolutions, that will effect this turn of the heart to God. *A man may maintain a fruitless struggle to return to God for many years in sincerity and earnestness; while the simple act of faith in the power and love of Jesus will at once bring him back.* Thus while “*thinking on his ways,*” let him walk in Christ as the way of return—and he will walk in the way of *God’s testimonies* with acceptance and delight. In this spirit of simplicity, he will be ready to listen to the first whisper of the convincing voice of the Spirit, which marks the early steps of secret declension from God.⁶ He will also thankfully accept the chastening rod, as the Lord’s appointed instrument of restoring his wandering children to himself. For so prone are they to turn their feet away from the Lord—so continually are they “turning aside like a deceitful bow;”⁷—and so deaf are they from the constitution of their sinful nature, to the ordinary calls of God, that in love and tender faithfulness to their souls, is he often constrained by the stroke of his heavy hand to arrest them in their career of thoughtlessness, and turn them back to himself. Most suitable then for such a state is the prayer of Basil—“Give me any cross, that may bring me into subjection to thy cross; and save me in spite of myself!”

¹ Compare 2 Kings vii. 4.

² Luke xv. 18.

³ Ib. 17.

⁴ Ezek. xviii. 28.

⁵ Psalm iv. 4.

⁶ See Isa. xxx. 21.

⁷ Psalm lxxviii. 57.

60. *I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

A SUPERFICIAL conviction brings with it a sense of duty without constraining to it. Men stand reasoning and doubting, instead of *making haste*. But a sound conviction sweeps away all excuses and delays. No time will be lost between making and performing resolutions. Indeed, in a matter of life and death—of eternal life and eternal death¹—the call is too clear for debate, and there is no room for delay. Many a precious soul has been lost by waiting for “a more convenient season”²—a period, which probably may never arrive, and which the wilful neglect of present opportunity provokes God to put far away. To-day is God’s time. To-morrow ruins thousands. To-morrow is another world. “*To-day—while it is called to-day; if you will hear his voice*”³—“*make haste, and delay not.*” Resolutions, however sincere, and convictions, however serious, “will pass away as the morning cloud and as the early dew,”⁴ unless they are carefully cherished, and instantly improved. The bonds of iniquity will soon prove too strong for the bonds of your own resolutions; and in the first hour of temptation, convictions, left to chance to grow, will prove as powerless as the “seven green withs” to bind the giant Samson.⁵ If ever delays are dangerous, much more are they in this concern of eternity. If, therefore, convictions begin to work, instantly yield to their influence. If any worldly or sinful desire is touched, let this be the moment for its crucifixion. If any affection is kindled towards the Saviour, give immediate expression to its voice. If any grace is reviving, let it be called forth into instant duty. This is the best—the only—expedient to fix and detain the motion of the Spirit now striving in the heart: and who knoweth but the improvement of the present advantage may be the moment of victory over difficulties hitherto found insuperable, and may open the path to heaven with less interruption, and more steady progress?

It is from the neglect of this “*haste*” that convictions often alternately ebb and flow so long, before they settle in a sound conversion. Indeed the instant movement—“*making haste and delaying not*”—marks the principle of the spiritual life. Thus was the prodigal’s resolution no sooner formed than in action. He said, “I will arise and go to my father—and *he arose*, and came to his father.”⁶ When Matthew heard the voice—“Follow me—*he left all, rose up* and followed him.”⁷ When Zaccheus was called from the top of the sycamore-tree, “*Make haste*, and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house—*he made haste*, and came down, and received him joyfully.”⁸

Ah! as you prize a hope for eternity; as you wish to “flee from the wrath to come,” and to “flee for refuge to the hope set before you”—beware of smothering early convictions. They may prove the first dawn of eternal day upon the soul—the first visit of the

¹ See Deut. xxx. 18.

² Acts xxiv. 25.

³ Heb. iv. 7.

⁴ Hosea vi. 4.

⁵ Judges xvi. 9.

⁶ Luke xv. 18—20.

⁷ Ib. v. 27, 28. Comp. Matt. iv. 18—22.

⁸ Luke xix. 5, 6. Compare also the example of Paul, Gal. i. 15, 16.

quickeningspirit of the heart. Guard them with unceasing watchfulness. Nourish them with believing prayer. "Exercise" them "unto" practical "godliness."¹ "Quench not the Spirit."² Let not the spark be extinguished by opposition of the world. Let it not expire for want of the fuel of grace. Let it not lie dormant or inactive. "Stir up the gift of God which is in thee."³ Every exercise, every motion, adds grace to grace, and increases its vigor, health, and fruitfulness. The more we do, the more we find we can do. The withered hand, whenever stretched forth in obedience to the Saviour's word, and in dependence on his grace, will never fail of a supply of spiritual strength.⁴ Every successive act strengthens the disposition, until a continued succession has formed a ready and active habit of godliness. Thus the Lord works in setting us to work. Therefore think—determine—turn—"make haste, and delay not; and we wish you God speed;" "we bless you in the name of the Lord."⁵

Professor! did you realize eternity, would you hover as you do between heaven and hell? If you were truly alive and awake, no motion would be swift enough for your desire to "flee from the wrath"—to "flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you."⁶ If ever God should touch your heart, to feel the heavenly sweetness of communion with him, will there be no regret that the privilege was not sooner sought and enjoyed? Had I betaken myself earlier to a hearty interest in the ways of God, how much more knowledge, experience and comfort should I have attained! how much more honor should I have brought to God! how much more profit to my fellow-sinners! Remember—every day of carnal pleasure or lukewarm formality is a day lost to God—to your own happiness—to eternity.

A word to the believer—Have you any doubts to clear up, any peace to regain in the ways of the Lord? "*Make haste*" to set your heart to the work. *Make haste* to the blood of atonement. Be on the watch to "hear the shepherd's voice,"⁷ even if it be the voice of reproof. Promptness is a most important exercise of the habit of faith. Delay brings guilt to the conscience. The blessing of conviction—the comfortable sense of acceptance—the freedom of the Lord's service is sacrificed to sloth and procrastination. The work that is hard to-day will be harder still to-morrow, by the resistance of this day's convictions. A greater cost of self-denial, a heavier burden of sorrow and increasing unfitness for the service of God, will be the issue of *delay*. Be continually, therefore, looking for some beam of light to descend, and some influence of grace to flow in upon you from your exalted Head. A simple and vigorous faith will quickly enliven you with that love, delight, rejoicing in the Lord, readiness to work, and cheerfulness to suffer, which will once again make the ways of God "pleasantness and peace" to your soul.

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 7.² 1 Thess. v. 19.³ 2 Tim. i. 6.⁴ Mark iii. 5.⁵ Psalm cxxix. 8.⁶ Matt. iii. 7. Heb. vi. 18.⁷ John x. 27.

61. *The bands of the wicked have robbed me ; but I have not forgotten thy law.*

ARE we not too apt to cull out the easy work of the Gospel, and to call this love to God? Whereas true love is supreme, and ready to be at some loss, and to part with near and dear objects, knowing that he "is able to give us much more than" our love for him.¹ Our resolution to *keep his commandments* will soon be put to the test. Some trial to the flesh will prove whether we flinch from the cross, or study to prepare ourselves for it. Few of us, perhaps, have literally known this trial of David.² But the lesson to be learnt from his frame of mind under it, is of great importance to all who profess to have their "treasure in heaven." It teaches us, that only exercised faith will sustain us in the time of trouble. This faith will enable us instantly to recollect our heavenly portion, and to assure our interest in it, in a remembrance of the law of our God. Had David "*forgotten God's law,*" no other resource of comfort opened before him. But it was ready—substantiating to his mind "the things that were not seen and eternal."³ Look again at the Apostle's deliberate estimate of this very trial—not only bearing his loss, but absolutely forgetting it in the enjoyment of his better portion. "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, *for whom I have suffered the loss of all things; and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.*"⁴

The temper of mind under such trials as this serves indeed most clearly to discover the real bent of the heart. If we are in possession of a spiritual and heavenly portion, we shall bear to be "*robbed by the bands of the wicked,*" and yet, "hold fast our profession." David, under this calamity, "encouraged himself in the Lord his God."⁵ Job under the same visitation, "fell down upon the ground, and worshipped."⁶ The blessings indeed we lose, are but as a feather compared with the blessings which we retain. The Providence of God is abundant support for his children. Their prospects (not to speak of their present privileges) effectually secure them from ultimate loss, even in the spoiling of their worldly all.⁷ Thus the early Christians suffered "*the bands of the wicked to rob them*"—nay—they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods; *knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.*"⁸ We have indeed little reason to be frightened from religion by the anticipation of its trials. The exchange of the world for God, and of the service of sin for the ways of heaven, leaves no room for regret in life, in death, or in eternity. The Christian's darkest hour is ten thousand times brighter than the brightest day of the ungodly. The hope of the crown will enable us to bear the cross, and to realize its sanctifying support as a matter for unbounded praise.

But how desolate are the poor votaries of the world in the hour

¹ 2 Chron. xxv. 9. Comp. Job xlii. 10—12.

² 2 Cor. iv. 18. Heb. xi. 1.

⁴ Phil. iii. 8.

⁶ Job i. 13—17, 20.

⁷ See Mark x. 29, 30.

² See 1 Sam. xxx. 1—3.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

⁸ Heb. x. 34.

of trouble ! Ignorant of the all-sufficiency of the refuge of the Gospel ; instead of being driven to it by the gracious visitations of God, they would rather retreat into any hiding-place of their own, than direct their steps backward to him. Their circumstances of distress are most intensely aggravated by the sullen rebellion of the heart, which refuses to listen to those breathings of the Saviour's love, that would guide them to himself, as their sure, and peaceful, and eternal rest !¹ Would that we could persuade them to cast their souls in penitence and faith before his blessed cross !² The burden of sin, as Bunyan's pilgrim found, would then drop from their backs. And this burden once removed—other burdens before intolerable would be found comparatively light ; nay—all burdens would be removed in the enjoyment of the Christian privilege of casting all—sin—care—and trouble—upon Jesus. Contrast the state of destitution without him, with the abundant resources of the people of God. We have a double heaven—a heaven on earth, and a heaven above—one in present sunshine—the other in “the city, which hath no need of the sun”³—where our joys will be immediate—unclouded—eternal. Thus our portion embraces both worlds. Our present “joy no man taketh from us ;”⁴ and we have “laid up treasure in heaven,” where *the bands of the wicked* can “never break through, nor steal.”⁵

Christian ! Does not your faith realize a subsistence of things not seen ? The only reality in the apprehensions of the world are “the things that are seen, and are temporal.” Your realities are “the things that are not seen, and are eternal.” Then remember—if you be *robbed* of your earthly all, your treasure is beyond the reach of harm. You can still say—“I have all and abound.”⁶ You can live splendidly upon your God, though all is beggary around you. You confess the remembrance of the law of your God to be your unfailing stay—“*Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction.*”⁷

62. *At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee, because of thy righteous judgments.*

ANOTHER exercise of sacred pleasure is the ways of the Lord ! His *portion* was always satisfying to this holy man, and he was daily feeding upon it with fresh delight. There was no occasion for the painful restrictions and mortifications of a monastery to oblige him to self-denying observances. Much less was there any desire, by these extraordinary services, to work out a righteousness of his own, to recommend him to the favor of God. His diligence in this heavenly work was the spontaneous effusion of a heart “filled with the Spirit.”⁸ Presenting the morning and evening service “seven times a day,”⁹ was not enough for him ; but he must “*rise at midnight,*” to continue his song of praise. These hours sometimes had been spent in overwhelming sorrow.¹⁰ Now

¹ See Matt. xi. 28.

² 1 Peter v. 7.

³ Rev. xxi. 23.

⁴ John xvi. 22.

⁵ Matt. vi. 20.

⁶ Phil. iv, 18 ; also 2 Cor. vi. 10.

⁷ Verse 92.

⁸ Eph. v. 18.

⁹ See verses 147, 148, 164.

¹⁰ See Ps. lxxvii. 3, 4.

they were given to the privileged employment of praise.¹ Indeed it seems to have been his frequent custom to stir up his gratitude by a *midnight* review of the Lord's daily manifestations of mercy.² A most exciting example—especially for the child of sorrow, when “wearisome nights are appointed to him,” and he “is full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day!”³ Thus “let the saints be joyful in glory; *let them sing aloud upon their beds.*”⁴ We observe this Christian enjoyment under circumstances of outward trial. When “*at midnight*—their feet made fast in the stocks—Paul and Silas prayed, and *sang praises to God;*”⁵ *they gave thanks, because of his righteous judgments.*

We often complain of our want of spirituality in the Divine life—how much our body hinders the ascent of the soul heavenwards—how often drowsiness overcomes our evening communion with our God; the “weakness of the flesh” overpowering the “willingness of the Spirit.”⁶ But after making all due allowances for constitutional infirmity, how far are we “instant in season and out of season” in the “mortification of the flesh?”⁷ Do we earnestly seek for a heart delighting in heavenly things? The more the flesh is denied for the service of God, the more we shall be elevated for the enjoyment, and realize the privilege of the work; and instead of having so often to mourn that our “souls cleave unto the dust,”⁸ we shall “mount upwards with eagles’ wings,”⁹ and even now by anticipation, take our place before “the throne of God and the Lamb.” Such is the active influence of self-denial in exercising our graces and promoting our comfort! Oh! how much more fervent would be our prayers—how much more fruitful in blessings—were they enlivened with more abundant delight in the ‘angelical work of praise.’¹⁰ The theme is always before us. The subject of the heavenly song should constantly engage our songs on earth—Jesus and his love—the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain—his “power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.”¹¹ Midnight wakefulness would be far sweeter than slumber; yea, night itself would be turned into day, did “*the judgments of God,*” as manifested in the glory of the Saviour, thus occupy our hearts.¹² Lord, tune my heart to thy praise, and then no time will be unseasonable for this blessed employment. Time thus redeemed from sleep will be an antepast of the unwearied service of heaven.¹³

63. *I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.*

THOSE that love the Lord's service naturally associate with kindred spirits—with those that *fear him, and keep his precepts.*¹⁴ These two features identify the same character; as cheerful obedience is always the fruit of filial *fear*. These then are the Lord's

¹ Ps. xlii. 8. Comp. Job xxxv. 10.

² Ib. exxxix. 17, 18.

³ Job. vii. 3, 4.

⁴ Ps. cxlix. 5. ⁵ Acts xvi. 24, 25.

⁶ Matt. xxvi. 41.

⁷ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

⁸ Verse 25. ⁹ Isaiah xl. 31.

¹⁰ Baxter.

¹¹ Rev. v. 12.

¹² See Ib. xv. 3, 4.

¹³ Ib. iv. 8.

¹⁴ Compare Psalm ciii. 17, 18.

people; and union with him is in fact union with them. Sometimes the society of the refined and intelligent of this world may be more congenial to our natural taste. But ought there not be a restraint here? Ought not the Christian to say, "Surely the fear of God is not in this place;"¹ and "should I love them that hate the Lord?"² Let those of us, who live in close, and to a certain degree necessary, contact with the world, subject their hearts to an evening scrutiny on this subject. 'Has the society of this day refreshed my soul, or raised my heart to spiritual things? Has it promoted a watchful temper? Or has it not rather "quenched the spirit" of prayer and restrained my intercourse with God?' To meet the Christian in ordinary courtesy, *not in unity of heart*, is a sign of an unspiritual walk with God. Fellowship with God is "walking in the light." "Fellowship one with another" is the natural flow. "The communion of saints" is the fruit and effect of communion with God.³

The calls of duty, or the leadings of providence, may indeed unavoidably connect us with those, who "have no fear of God before their eyes." Nor should we repel them from religiously affecting a sullen or uncourteous⁴ habit. But such men, whatever be their attractions, will not be the companions of our choice. Fellowship with them, is to "remove the ancient land-mark;"⁵ to forget the broad line of separation between us and them; and to venture into the most hazardous atmosphere. If indeed our hearts were ascending, like a flame of fire, with a natural motion heavenwards, and carrying with them all in their way, the choice of the *companions* of our pilgrimage would be a matter of little importance. But so deadening to our spirit is the conversation of the men of this world, (however commanding their talents, or interesting their topics,) that even if we have been just before enlivened by the high privilege of communion with God, the free and self-indulgent interchange of their society will benumb our spiritual powers, and quickly freeze them again. To underrate therefore the privileged association with "*them that fear God*," is to incur—not only a most awful responsibility in the sight of God; but also a most serious hazard to our own souls.

If then we are not ashamed to confess ourselves Christians, let us not shrink from walking in fellowship with Christians. Even if they should exhibit some repulsive features of character, they bear the image of Him, whom we profess to love inexpressibly and incomparably above all. They will be our *companions* in an eternal home: they ought therefore to be our brothers now. How sweet, and holy, and heavenly is this near relation to them in our common Lord! Shall we not readily consent to his judgment, who pronounced "the righteous to be more excellent than his neighbor?"⁶ "Iron sharpeneth iron."⁷ If then "the iron be blunt," this will be one of the best means of "whetting the edge."⁸ The most

¹ Gen. xx. 11.² 2 Chron. xix. 2.³ See 1 John i. 3—7.⁴ See 1 Pet. iii. 6.⁵ Prov. xxii. 28.⁶ Ib. xii. 26.⁷ Ib. xxvii. 17.⁸ See Eccl. x. 10.

established servants of God gladly acknowledge the sensible refreshment of this union of heart.¹ It is marked in the word of God, as the channel of the communication of heavenly wisdom²—as a feature in the character of the citizens of Zion³—and as that disposition, which is distinguished with manifest tokens of the Saviour's presence;⁴ and which the great day will crown with the special seal of his remembrance. "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard" it; "and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day, when I make up my jewels."⁵

64. *The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy; teach me thy statutes.*

WHAT full provision is made for man's happiness! The first creation was *full of mercy*. God knew that he had created a being full of want. Every faculty wanted some suitable object, as the source of enjoyment in the gratification—of suffering in the denial; and now has he charged himself with making provision for them all—so perfect, that no want is left unprovided for.

But what a picture does the earth now present on every side—a world of rebels! yet a world "*full of the mercy of the Lord!*" "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom has thou made them all. The earth is full of thy riches. The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."⁶ And how does the contemplation of the Lord's "*mercy*" in providence encourage our faith, in the expectancy of spiritual privileges! "O Lord! thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! *therefore* the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wing. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures."⁷ 'As thou dost largely bestow thy blessings upon all creatures according to their nature and condition, so I do desire the spiritual blessings of the lively light of thy law and word, which are fitting and convenient for the being and happiness of my soul.'⁸ As an ignorant sinner, "what I see not, teach thou me."⁹ "*Teach me thy statutes,*" that which thou hast appointed, as the way of duty and the path to glory—that path which I am utterly unable to discover, or when discovered, to walk in, without the help of thy grace. And indeed the hearts of his

¹ Comp. 1 Sam. xxiii. 16. Psalm xvi. 3. Acts xxviii. 15. Rom. i. 11, 12. 2 Cor. vii. 6, 7.

² Prov. xiii. 20.

³ Psalm xv. 1, 4. Comp. Psalm xvi. 3, and especially 1 John iii. 14.

⁴ Luke xxiv. 15, 32.

⁵ Mal. iii. 16, 17.

⁶ Psalm civ. 24; cxlv. 15, 16.

⁷ Ib. xxxvi. 6—8.

⁸ Diodati. "It is worthy of especial notice, how often, and in what varied connections, David in this Psalm prays to be taught the statutes of God, though he seems to have been more intimately acquainted with the sacred oracles, as then extant, than almost any other man; but he knew that Divine teaching alone could enable him rightly to understand the Scriptures, and to apply general rules to all the variety of particular cases, which occurred in the course of his life."—*Scott*.

⁹ Job xxxiv. 32.

people are the vessels, into which the Lord is continually pouring more and more of himself, until they shall "be filled with all the fulness of God."¹ Every good, according to its character and degree, is diffusive. And thus the goodness or *mercy of God* pervades his whole universe—natural—plentiful—free—communicative.²

Yet none but a believer will understand how to use the plea which is here employed. The *mercy* that he sees on every side, is to him a pledge and earnest of that *mercy*, which his soul needs within. The world indeed in its present falling state, when seen through the medium of pride and discontent, exhibits a picture of misery, not of mercy; and only ministers occasion for complaint against the Creator. But the believer—feeling the infinite and eternal desert of sin—cannot but know that the lowest exercise of goodness in God is an act of free undeserved mercy. No wonder then that he sees mercy in everything—in every part of the universe of God—a world "*full of mercy*." The very food we eat, our raiment, our habitations, the contrivances for our comfort, are not mere displays of goodness, but manifestations of mercy. Having forfeited all claim upon the smallest consideration of God, there could have been no just ground of complaint, had all these blessings been made occasions of suffering, instead of comfort and indulgence.

Indeed is it not a marvel, that when man—*full of mercy*—is lifting up his hand against his God—employing against him all the faculties which his *mercy* gave and has preserved—that God should be so seldom provoked to strike by their aggravated provocations? What multitude—what weight—what variety of mercy doth he still shower upon us! Even our hair—though seemingly so unimportant—the seat of loathsome, defiling, and even mortal disease, is the object of his special care.³ All the limbs of the body—all the faculties of the mind—all the affections of the heart—all the powers of the will: keeping us in health—capable of acting for our own happiness—how does he restrain them from those exercises or movements which might be fatal to our happiness!

And then the question naturally recurs—and to a spiritual mind will never weary by its recurrence—Whence flows all this mercy? Oh! it is delightful indeed to answer such an inquiry—delightful to contemplate him, "in whom" we are not only "blessed with all spiritual blessings;"⁴ but who is also the medium, through which our temporal comforts are conveyed to us. How sweet to eye these mercies, as bought with the most precious blood that ever was known in the world, and to mark the print of the nails of our crucified friend stamped upon the least of them! We allow it to add a relish to our enjoyments, that we can consider them as provided by some beloved friend; and should not our mercies be doubly sweet in the remembrance of that munificent Friend, who pur-

¹ Eph. iii. 19.² Verse 68.³ Matt. x. 30.⁴ Eph. i. 3.

chased them for us so dearly; who bestows them upon us so richly; yea, who gives himself with them all?

Have we heard of this mercy of God? And do we feel the need of it for ourselves—for every moment? Then let us apply to the throne of grace in the free and open way of acceptance and access. Let us go to the King (as Benhadad's servants to the King of Israel¹) in the spirit of self-condemnation and faith. Our acceptance does not depend (as in the case referred to) upon a "peradventure;" but it rests upon the sure word of promise, "Him that cometh to me, *I will in no wise cast out.*"²

PART IX.

65. *Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word.*

THERE is a time for all things in the believer's experience—for confession, prayer, praise. This Psalm mostly expresses the professions and prayers of the man of God—yet mingled with thankful acknowledgment of mercy. He had prayed, "*Deal bountifully with thy servant.*"³ Perhaps here is the acknowledgment of the answer to his prayer, "*Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word.*" And who among us has not daily reason to make the same acknowledgment? Even in those trials, when we have indulged hard thoughts of God, a clearer view of his judgments, and a more simple dependence upon his faithfulness and love, will rebuke our impatience and unbelief, and encourage our trust.⁴ Subsequent experience altered Jacob's hasty view of the Lord's dealings with him. In a moment of peevishness, the recollection of the supposed death of a beloved son, and the threatened bereavement of another, tempted him to say, "*All these things are against me.*"⁵ At a brighter period of his day, when clouds were beginning to disperse, we hear that "the spirit of Jacob revived. And Jacob said, *It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive, I will go and see him before I die.*"⁶ And when his evening sun was going down almost without a cloud, in the believing act of "blessing the sons of" his beloved "Joseph,"⁷ how

¹ Comp. 1 Kings xx. 31.

² John vi. 37.

³ Verse 17.

⁴ "If all the sad losses, trials, sicknesses, infirmities, griefs, heaviness, and inconsistency of the creature be expounded to be, as I am sure they are, the rods of the jealousy of a Father in heaven, contending with all your lovers on earth, though there were millions of them, for your love, to fetch it home to heaven, single, unmixed, you will forgive (if we may use that word) every rod of God, and 'let not the sun go down upon your wrath' against any messenger of your afflicting and correcting Father."—*Rutherford's Letters.*

⁵ Gen. xlii. 36.

⁶ Ib. xlv. 27, 28.

⁷ Heb. xi. 21.

clearly does he retract the language of his former sinful impatience! —“God before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk—the God which fed me all my life long unto this day—the *Angel which redeemed me from all evil*, bless the lads.”¹ This surely was in the true spirit of the acknowledgment, *Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word.*

And how is it that any of us have ever harbored a suspicion of unbelief? Has God in any one instance falsified his promise? Has “the vision” failed to come at the end? Has it ever “*lied?*”² Has he not “confirmed his promise by an oath,” “that we might have two immutable things” as the ground of “*strong consolation?*”³ Any degree less than *the full credit* that he deserves, is admitting the false principle, that God is a man that he should lie, and the son of a man that he should repent. It weakens the whole spiritual frame, shakes our grasp of the promise, destroys our present comfort, and brings foreboding apprehensions of the future. Whereas, if we have faith and patience to wait,—“in the mount the Lord shall be seen.”⁴ “All things” may seem to be “against us,” while at the very moment under the wonder-working hand of God, they are “working together for our good.”⁵ When therefore we “are in heaviness through manifold temptations,” and we discover a “needs be” for it all, and “the trial of faith is found unto praise and honor and glory”⁶—when we are thus reaping the fruitful discipline of our Father’s school,⁷ must we not put a fresh seal to our testimony, “*Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord?*” But why should we delay our acknowledgment till we come out of our trial? Ought we not to give it even in the midst of our “heaviness?”⁸ Faith has enabled many, and would enable us, to “glorify God in the fires;”⁹ to “trust” him, even when “walking in darkness, and having no light;”¹⁰ and, even while smarting under his chastening rod, to acknowledge, that he “*has dealt well with us.*”

But if I doubt the reasonableness of this acknowledgment, then let me, while suffering under trial, endeavor to take up different language. ‘Lord, thou hast dealt ill with thy servant; thou hast not kept thy word.’ If in a moment of unbelief my impatient heart, like Jacob’s, could harbor such a dishonorable suspicion, my conscience would soon smite me with conviction—‘What! shall I, who am “called out of darkness into marvellous light”—shall I, who am rescued from slavery and death, and brought into a glorious state of liberty and life, complain? Shall I, who have been redeemed at so great a price, and who have a right to “all the promises of God in Christ Jesus,”¹¹ and who am now an “heir of God, and joint heir with Christ”¹²—murmur at my Father’s will?

¹ Gen. xlviii. 15, 16.

² Hab. ii. 3.

³ Heb. vi. 17, 18.

⁴ Gen. xxii. 14. See Scott in loco.

⁵ Rom. viii. 28.

⁶ 1 Peter i. 6, 7.

⁷ Heb. xii. 11.

⁸ Verses 71, 75. “In everything (therefore including affliction) by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving,” &c. Phil. iv. 6. Compare also 1 Thess. v. 18.

⁹ Isaiah xxiv. 15.

¹⁰ Ib. i. 10.

¹¹ 2 Cor. i. 20.

¹² Rom. viii. 17.

Alas, that my heart should prove so foolish, so weak, so ungrateful! Lord! I would acknowledge with thankfulness, and yet with humiliation, "*Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, according to thy word.*" But how sinfully do we neglect these honorable and cheering acknowledgments! Were we habitually to mark them for future remembrance, we should be surprised to see how their numbers would multiply. "If we should count them, they are more in number than the sand."¹ And truly such recollections—enhancing every common, as well as every special mercy—would come up as a sweet savor to God "by Christ Jesus."² "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and *all that is within me* bless his holy name; and forget not all his benefits."³

66. *Teach me good judgment and knowledge; for I have believed thy commandments.*

IF the perception of the Lord's merciful dealings with my soul is obscure—*Teach me good judgment and knowledge.* Give me a clear and enlarged apprehension, that I may be ready with my acknowledgment—*All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth.*⁴ Or even with an enlightened assurance of his wise and faithful dispensations, still would I urge this petition before him, as needful for every step of my path. Indeed this prayer illustrates the simplicity and intelligence of Christian faith—always desiring, asking, and expecting the most suitable blessings. For what blessings can be more suitable to an ignorant sinner, than *good judgment and knowledge*: "*knowledge*" of ourselves, of our Saviour, of the way of obedience—and "*good judgment*," to apply this knowledge to some valuable end? These two parts of our intellectual furniture have a most important connection and dependence upon each other. "*Knowledge*" is the speculative perception of general truth. "*Judgment*" is the practical application of it to the heart and conduct. No school, but the school of Christ, no teaching, but the teaching of the Spirit—can ever give this "*good judgment and knowledge.*" Solomon asks it for himself⁵—Paul for his people.⁶ Both direct us to God as the sole fountain and author.⁷

We cannot fail of observing a very common defect in Christians—warm affections connected with a blind or loose judgment. Hence too often a lightness in religion, equally unsteady in profession and

¹ Psalm cxxxix. 18.

² Heb. xiii. 15.

³ Psalm ciii. 1, 2.

⁴ Ib. xxv. 10.

⁵ 1 Kings iii. 9.

⁶ Phil. i. 9, 10. Col. i. 9.

⁷ Prov. ii. 6. 1 Cor. i. 5. 2 Tim. i. 7. It is recorded of one of the Reformers, that, when he had well acquitted himself in a public disputation, a friend begged to see the notes, which he had been observed to write, supposing that he had taken down the arguments of his opponents, and sketched the substance of his own reply. Greatly was he surprised to find that they consisted simply of these ejaculatory petitions—"More light, Lord,—more light, —more light!" How fully was the true spirit of prayer compressed in these short aspirations! Could they fail of success? "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." James i. 5. Greenham, being asked his judgment of some important matters, answered: "Sir, neither am I able to speak, nor you to hear; for we have not prayed. I may indeed talk, and you may answer, as natural men; but we are not now prepared to confer as children of God." Works, p. 19.

in practice—easily satisfied with a narrow compass in the vast field of Scripture, instead of grasping a full survey of those truths, which are so intimately connected with our Christian establishment and privilege. Much perplexing doubt, discouragement, and fear; much mistaken apprehension of important truth, much coldness and backsliding of heart and conduct, arises from the want of an accurate and full apprehension of the scriptural system.

This prayer has a special application to the tender and sensitive child of God. The disease of his constitution is too often a scrupulous conscience—one of the most active and successful enemies to his settled peace and quietness.¹ The faculty of conscience partakes with every other power of man of the injury of the fall; and therefore, with all its intelligence, honesty, and power, is liable to misconception. Like a defect of vision, it often displaces objects: and, in apparently conflicting duties, that which touches the feeling, or accords with the temper, is preferred to one, which though more remotely viewed, really possessed a higher claim. Thus it pronounces its verdict from the predominance of feeling, rather than from the exercise of judgment—more from an indistinct perception of the subject presented to the mind, than from a simple immediate reference “to the law and testimony.” Again—matters of trivial moment are often insisted upon, to the neglect of important principles.² External points of offence are more considered, than the habitual mortification of the inward principle. Conformity to the world in dress and appearance is more strongly censured than the general spirit of worldliness in the temper and conduct of *outward non-conformists*; while *the spirit of separation from the world (which may exist in a somewhat wider range of Christian liberty, than the narrow perception of some professors has conceived,*³) is totally disregarded. Thus are non-essentials confounded with fundamentals—things indifferent with things unlawful, from a narrow misconception of what is directly forbidden and allowed.⁴ Conscience, therefore, must not be trusted without the light of the word of God; and most important is the prayer, “*Teach me good judgment and knowledge.*”

The exercises of this state of feeling are both endless and causeless. In the well-intended endeavor to guard against a devious track, the mind is constantly harassed with an over-anxious inquiry, whether the right path is accurately discovered; and thus at once the pleasure and the progress of the journey are materially

¹ “Scruple,” as Bishop Taylor justly observes, “is a little stone in the foot. If you set it on the ground, it hurts you. If you hold it up, you cannot go forward. It is a trouble, when trouble is over; a doubt, when doubts are resolved; a little party behind the hedge, when the main army is broken and cleared; and when conscience is instructed in its way, and girt for action, a light trifling reason, or an absurd fear, hinders it from beginning the journey, or proceeding in the way, or resting at the journey’s end.” Duct. Dubitant. Book i. chap. vi. See Calvin’s lively description of scrupulosity in Scott’s Analysis of his Institutes.—Continuation of Milner, iii. 563.

² Col. ii. 18.

³ See I Cor. viii. 4, 7.

⁴ “Measuring actions by atoms is the way, not to govern, but to disorder, conscience.” —Bishop Taylor, *ut supra*.

hindered. The influence, therefore, of this morbid sensibility is strenuously to be resisted. It renders the strait way more strait. It retards the work of grace in the soul. It is usually connected with self-righteousness. It savors of, and tends to produce, hard thoughts of God. It damps our cheerfulness in his service, and unfits us for the duty of the present moment. What, however, is more than all to be deprecated, is, that it multiplies sin; or, to speak more clearly, it superinduces another species of sin, besides the actual transgression of the law of God. For opposition to the dictates of conscience in any particular is sin, even though the act itself may be allowed by the law of God. We may, therefore, sin in the act of doing good, or in obedience to the liberty and enjoyment of the Gospel, as well as in the allowed transgression of the law. Indeed, under the bondage of scrupulous conscience, we seem to be entangled in the sad necessity of sinning. *The dictates of conscience, even when grounded upon misconception, are authoritative.*¹ Listening to its suggestions may be sinning against the liberty, wherewith Christ has made us "free," and in which we are commanded to "stand fast."² No human authority can free from its bonds. Resistance to its voice is disobedience to God's vicegerent, and therefore, *in a qualified sense at least*, disobedience to God himself. And thus it is sin, even when that which conscience condemns may be innocent.³

The evil of a scrupulous conscience may often be traced to a diseased temperament of body, to a naturally weak or perverted understanding, to the unfavorable influence of early prejudice—to a want of simple exercise of faith, or perception of the matters of faith. In these cases faith may be sincere, though weak; and the sin, such as it is, is a sin of infirmity, calling for our pity, forbearance, prayer, and help. In many instances, however, wilful ignorance, false shame that will not inquire, or a pertinacious adherence to deep-rooted opinion is the source of the disease. Now such persons must be roused, even at the hazard of wounding the conscience of the more tenderly scrupulous. But as the one class decidedly sin, and the other too frequently indulge their infirmity, the excitement will probably be ultimately useful to both. Both need to have the conscience enlightened; and to obtain "a right judgment in all things"—by a more diligent "search in the Scriptures"—by "seeking the law at the mouth of the priest"⁴—and, above all, by earnest prayer with the Psalmist—"Teach me good judgment and knowledge." Thus they will discern between what is imperative, and what is indifferent: what is lawful, and what is expedient. If

¹ See Rom. xiv. 14. "To him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, (though clean by the express appointment of God, Acts x. 9—15, 1 Tim. iv. 3—5, and only "unclean" therefore by the misconception of conscience,) to him it is unclean,"—i. e., he must not touch it upon the ground of conscience, though the Gospel allowed the use of it, and it was an infringement of Christian liberty to abstain from it. Thus did his ignorance make to himself an occasion of sin.

² Gal. v. 1, with iv. 9, 10.

³ Compare Rom. xiv. 20—23.

⁴ Mal. ii. 7. See the example of the primitive church, Acts xv. 1, 2.

“whatsoever is not of faith is sin,” then the only prospect of the removal of the doubt will be increase of faith—that is, a more full persuasion of the Divine warrant and instruction.¹ “Howbeit there is not in every one this knowledge;”² yet the exhortation speaks alike to all—“Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”³ Indeed the most favorable symptoms of scrupulosity (except where the disease originates in external causes) partake of the guilt of wilful ignorance; because none can be said sincerely to ask for “*good judgment and knowledge*,” who do not diligently improve all means of obtaining it. If, therefore, the scrupulous shrink from honestly seeking the resolution of their difficulties in private conferences (where they are to be had) with ministers or experienced Christians, so far they must be considered as wilfully ignorant. We would indeed “receive them,” “bear with their infirmities,”⁴ and encourage them to expect relief from their hard bondage in the way of increasing diligence, humility, and prayer. While their minds are in doubt concerning the path of duty, their actions must be imperfect and unsatisfactory. Let them, therefore, wait, inquire, and pray, until their way be made plain. This done, let them act according to their conscience, allowing nothing that it condemns, neglecting nothing which it requires. The responsibility of error (should error be eventually detected) will not be—the too implicit following of the guidance of conscience—but the want of due care and diligence for its more clear illumination. Generally, however, the rule will apply—“If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”⁵

But, *besides the scrupulous conscience, the imperfectly enlightened conscience* presents a case equally to be deprecated. Often does it charge to a sinful source those incessant variations of feeling, which originate in bodily indisposition, or accidental influence of temptation. Sins of infirmity are confounded with sins of indulgence; occasional with habitual transgressions of duty. Only a part of the character is brought under cognizance; and while short comings or surprisals are justly condemned; yet the exercise of contrition, faith, love, and watchfulness, is passed by unnoticed. Thus the Gospel becomes the very reverse of the appointment of its gracious Author.⁶ It brings ashes for beauty, mourning for the oil of joy, and the spirit of heaviness for the garment of praise. If this evil is “not a sin unto death,” it is “a sore evil under the sun,” which may often give occasion for the prayer—“*Teach me good judgment and knowledge*,” that, in the simplicity of faith, I may be blessed with a tender conscience, and be delivered from the bondage of a scrupulous, and from the perplexity of an unenlight-

¹ Rom. xiv. 5.

² 1 Cor. viii. 7.

³ 2 Peter iii. 18.

⁴ Rom. xiv. 1; xv. 1.

⁵ Matt. vi. 22. Compare Prov. xxiv. 5. For a similar view of this case, see Baxter's Christian Directory, Book i. chap. iii. The sacrifices appointed for sins of ignorance under the law, (Lev. iv.,) mark God's sense of this case; while the frequent breaches of Christian unity and forbearance arising from it may well justify this extended consideration of it.

⁶ Compare Isaiah lxi. 3.

ened conscience. Let my heart never condemn me where it ought not. Let it never fail to condemn me where it ought.

But alas! the perception of our need of this "*good judgment and knowledge*," is far too indistinct and uninfluential. We need to cry for these valuable blessings with deeper earnestness, and more diligent and patient waiting upon God. Divine wisdom is a treasury, that does not spend by giving; and we may ask to be enriched to the utmost extent of our wants, "in full assurance of faith." But this faith embraces the whole revelation of God—the *commandments as well as the promises*. And thus it becomes the principle of Christian obedience. For can we *believe these commandments* to be as they are represented—"holy, just, and good," and not delight in them? "In those is continuance"—saith the prophet—"and we shall be saved."² Convinced of their perfection, acknowledging their obligations, loving them, and living in them, we shall "come to full age" in the knowledge of the Gospel, and, "by reason of use have our senses exercised to discern good and evil."³

67. *Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.*

THE *teaching of good judgment and knowledge* will lead us to deprecate, instead of desiring, a prosperous state. But should the Christian, by the appointment of God, be thrown into this seductive atmosphere, he will feel the prayer that is so often put into his lips, most peculiarly expressive of his need—"In all time of our wealth—Good Lord! deliver us!"⁴ A time of wealth is indeed a time of special need. It is hard to restrain the flesh, when so many are the baits for its indulgence. Such mighty power is here given to the enemy, while our perception of his power is fearfully weakened! Many and affecting instances are recorded of the heart of the Lord's people, in the deadening influence of a proud and worldly spirit.⁵ But the unmitigated curse to the ungodly is written as with a sun-beam for our warning—"When Jeshurun waxed fat, he kicked—I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear."⁶ But how awful will be the period, when the question shall speak to the conscience with all the poignancy of self-conviction—"What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" What is the end of this flowery path? "Death?"⁷ "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castest them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors!"⁸ "the prosperity of fools shall destroy them."⁹

Our Saviour's allotment for his people—"In the world ye shall have tribulation"¹⁰—marks not less his wisdom than his love. This is the gracious rod, by which he scourges back his prodigal children

¹ Rom. vii. 12, with 22.

² Isa. lxiv. 5.

³ Heb. v. 14.

⁴ Litany.

⁵ The histories of David, 1 Chron. xxi. 1—4; Solomon, 1 Kings xi. 1—8; Uzziah, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16; and Hezekiah, 2 Chron. xxxii. 25—32, will readily occur to the mind.

⁶ Deut. xxxii. 15. Jer. xxii. 21.

⁷ Rom. vi. 21.

⁸ Psalm lxxiii. 18, 19.

⁹ Prov. i. 32.

¹⁰ John xvi. 33. Acts xiv. 22. 1 Thess. iii. 3.

to himself. This is the wise discipline, by which he preserves them from the poisoned sweetness of carnal allurements, and keeps their hearts in a simple direction towards himself, as the well-spring of their everlasting joy. With all of them this one method has been pursued. All have been taught in one school. All have known the power of affliction in some of its varied forms of inward conflict or outward trouble. All have found a time of affliction a time of love. All have given proof, that the pains bestowed upon them have not been in vain. Thus did Manasseh in affliction beseech "the Lord, and humble himself greatly before the Lord God of his fathers."¹ Thus also in afflictions the Lord "heard Ephraim bemoaning himself;"² and beheld Israel "seeking him early,"³ and the forlorn wandering child casting a wishful, penitent look towards his Father's house, as if the pleasures, that had enticed his heart from home, were now embittered to the soul.⁴

And thus the Christian can give some account of the means by which his Father is leading and preparing him for heaven. Perhaps he did not at first see the reason.⁵ It was matter of faith, not of consciousness. But in looking back, how clear the path, how valuable the benefit—*Before I was afflicted, I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.* I never prized it before. I could, indeed, scarcely be said to know it. I never understood its comfort until affliction expounded it to me. I never till now saw its suitability to my case. But what an heightened aggravation of guilt, when these especial mercies fail of their gracious end—when vanity, worldliness, and sin still reign with uncontrolled sway! Ah! when sinners are unhumbled "under the mighty hand of God"—when they are afflicted, and not purged by affliction—when it is said of them—"They received not correction"⁶—it seems the forerunner of that tremendous judgment—"Why should ye be stricken any more."⁷

Heavenly Father! keep thy poor weak erring child from this fearful doom. Let not that measure of prosperity, which thou mayest be pleased to vouchsafe, prove my curse. But especially let every cross, every affliction, which thou art pleased to mingle in my cup, conform me more to my Saviour's image, restrain my heart from its daily wanderings, and give thy holy ways and word to my soul, and give me sweeter anticipations of that blessed home, where I shall never wander more, but find my eternal happiness in "*keeping thy word.*"

68. *Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.*

THE blessed effects of chastisement, as a special instance of the Lord's goodness, might naturally lead to a general acknowledgment of the goodness of his character and dispensation. Judging in unbelieving haste, of his providential and gracious dealings, fee-

¹ 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12. Compare Dan. iv. 36, 37.

³ Hosea v. 15; vi. 1, 2.

⁶ Zeph. iii. 2.

⁴ Luke xv. 16, 17.

⁷ Isaiah i. 5.

² Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

⁵ See Heb. xii. 11.

ble sense imagines a frown, when the eye of faith discerns a smile, upon his face; and therefore in proportion as faith is exercised in the review of the past, and the experience of the present, we shall be prepared with the ascription of praise—" *Thou art good.*" This is indeed the expression¹—the confidence²—the pleading³—of faith. It is the sweet taste of experience—checking the legality of the conscience, the many hard and dishonorable thoughts of God, and invigorating a lively enjoyment of him. Indeed 'this is the true and genuine character of God. He is good⁴—He is goodness. Good in himself—good in his essence—good in the highest degree. All the names of God are comprehended in this one of " *Good.*"⁵ All the acts of God are nothing else but the effluxes of his goodness, distinguished by several names according to the object it is exercised about. When he confers happiness without merit, it is grace. When he bestows happiness against merit, it is mercy. When he bears with provoking rebels, it is long-suffering. When he performs his promise, it is truth. When he commiserates a distressed person, it is pity. When he supplies an indigent person, it is bounty. When he succors an innocent person, it is righteousness. And when he pardons a penitent person, it is mercy. All summed up in this one name—Goodness. None so communicatively good as God. As the notion of God includes goodness, so the notion of goodness includes diffusiveness. Without goodness he would cease to be a Deity; and without diffusiveness he would cease to be good. The being good is necessary to the being God. For goodness is nothing else in the notion of it but a strong inclination to do good, either to find or to make an object, wherein to exercise itself, according to the propension of its own nature. And it is an inclination of communicating itself, not for its own interest, but for the good of the object it pitcheth upon. Thus God is good by nature; and his nature is not without activity. He acts consistently with his own nature;—' *Thou art good, and doest good.*'"⁶

How easily is such an acknowledgment excited towards an earthly friend! Yet who has not daily cause to complain of the coldness of his affections towards his God? It would be a sweet morning's reflection to recollect some of the innumerable instances, in which the goodness of God has been most distinctly marked; to trace them in their peculiar application to our own need; and above all to mark, not only the source from which they come, but the channel through which they flow. A view of covenant love does indeed make the goodness of God to shine with inexpressible brightness

¹ Heb. xi. 6.

² Nahum i. 7.

³ Psalm xxv. 7; lxxxvi. 5.

⁴ Ib. xxxiv. 8, with Micah vii. 18.

⁵ The revealed "goodness" of God made to Moses in answer to his prayer—"I beseech thee show me thy glory"—shows it to be not a single attribute, or a display of any particular feature of the Divine character, but rather the combined exercise of all his perfections. Exodus xxxiii. 18, 19. with xxxiv. 5—7.

⁶ Charnock's Works, vol. i. 581, 585, 588. For another exquisite view (parallel, and in some degree identical, with Charnock) of this "perfecting perfection, which crowns and consummates all the rest,"—see Howe's Works, 8vo. edit. 1822, viii. pp. 107—114.

“in the face of Jesus Christ;”¹ and often when the heart is conscious of backsliding, does the contemplation of this “goodness” under the influence of the Spirit, prove the Divinely-appointed means of “leading us to repentance.”² Let us therefore wait on, even when we see nothing. Soon we shall see, where we did not look for it. Soon we shall find *goodness* unmingled—joy unclouded, unspeakable, eternal.

Meanwhile, though the diversified manifestations—the materials of our happiness—in all around us—be countless as the drops of sand and the particles of dew—yet without heavenly *teaching* they only become occasions of our deeper misery and condemnation. It is not enough that the Lord gives—he must *teach us his statutes*. Divine truths can only be apprehended by Divine *teaching*. The scholar, who has been longest taught, realizes most his need of this teaching, and is most earnest in seeking it. Indeed “the earth is full of the *goodness* of the Lord,” yet we may be utterly ignorant of it. The instances of goodness in the shape of a cross, we consider to be the reflection on it. Nothing is goodness in our eyes that crosses our own inclination. We can hardly bear to hear of the cross, much more to take it up. We talk of goodness, but yield to discontent. We do not profess to dislike trial—only the trial now pressing upon us—any other cross than this—that is, my will and wisdom rather than God’s. Is there not therefore great need of this prayer for Divine *teaching*, that we may discern singly the Lord’s mercies so closely crowded together, and make the due improvement of each? Twice before had the Psalmist sent up this prayer and plea.³ Yet he seems to make the supplication ever new by the freshness and vehemency of his desires. And let me ever make it new by the remembrance of that one display of goodness, which casts every other manifestation into the shade—“God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son.”⁴

This constitutes of itself a complete mirror of infinite and everlasting goodness—the only intelligent display of his goodness—the only manifestation, that prevents from abusing it. What can I say to this—but “*Thou art good, and doest good?*” What may I not then expect from thee! “*Teach me thy statutes.*” Teach me the Revelation of thyself—Teach me the knowledge of thy Son. For “this is life eternal, that I might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”⁵

69. *The proud have forged a lie against me; but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.*

IF the Lord *does us good*, we must expect Satan to do us evil. Acting in his own character, as a “liar and a father of it,”⁶ he readily puts it into the hearts of his children to “*forge lies against*” the children of God! But all is overruled by the ever-watchful care and providence of God for the eventual good of his Church.

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

² Rom. ii. 4.

³ Verses 12, 64. Comp. Ps. xxv. 8.

⁴ John iii. 16.

⁵ 1b. xvii. 3.

⁶ 1b. viii. 44.

The cross frightens the insincere, and removes them out of the way; while the steadfastness of his own people marvellously displays to the world the power and triumph of faith. A most delightful source of encouragement in this fiery trial is to take off the eye from the objects of sense, and to fix it upon Jesus as our pattern, no less than our life. For every trial, in which we are conformed to his suffering image, supplies to us equal direction and support. Do "*the proud forge lies against us?*" So did they against him.¹ "The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household."² "*Consider him therefore, that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*"³

But is it always "*lies that are forged against us?*" Is there no worldliness, or pride, or inconsistency in temper and walk, that opens the mouths of the enemies of the Gospel, and causes "the way of truth to be evil spoken of?"⁴ Do they not sometimes say all manner of evil against some of us, for Christ's sake; yet alas! not altogether "falsely?"⁵ "Woe unto the world, because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"⁶ If however the reproach of the world be "the reproach of Christ," "let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised."⁷ Insincerity of heart can never support us to a consistent and persevering endurance of the cross. A heart divided between God and the world will ever be found faulty and backsliding.⁸ *Wholeness of heart* in the precepts of God adorns the Christian profession, awes the ungodly world, realizes the full extent of the Divine promises, and pours into the soul such a spring-tide of enjoyment, as more than counterbalances all the reproach, contempt, and falsehood, which *the forge* of the great enemy is employing against us with unceasing activity, and relentless hatred. Yet forget not, believer, that these proofs of the malicious enmity of the proud must often be received as the gentle stroke of your Father's chastisement. Let the fruits of it then be daily visible in the work of mortification—in the exercise of the suffering graces of the Gospel—in your growing conformity to his image—and in a progressive meetness for the world of eternal uninterrupted love.

70. *Their heart is as fat as grease: but I delight in thy law.*

AN awful description of the hardened state of *the proud forgers of lies!* Yet not of their state only, but of every sinner who stands out in wilful rebellion against God. The tremendous blow of Almighty justice has benumbed his heart, so that the pressure of mountains of sin and guilt is unfelt! The heart is left of God,

¹ Comp. Matt. xxvi. 59—61.

⁴ 2 Peter ii. 2.

⁷ Heb. x. 23.

² Ib. x. 24, 25.

⁵ See Matt. v. 11.

⁸ Comp. Hosca x. 2. Jer. iii. 10.

³ Heb. xii. 3.

⁶ Ib. xviii. 7.

"seared with a hot iron,"¹ and therefore without tenderness; "past feeling;"² unsoftened by the power of the word; unhumbled by the rod of providential dispensations, given up to the heaviest of all spiritual judgments! But it is of little avail to stifle the voice of conscience, unless the same power or device could annihilate hell. It will only "awake out of sleep, like a giant refreshed with wine,"³ and rage with tenfold interminable fury in the eternal world, from the temporary restraint, which for a short moment had benumbed its energy. Wilful resistance to the light of the Gospel, and the strivings of the Spirit, constrained even from a God of love the message of judicial abandonment—"Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."⁴ Who then among us will not cry, *From hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word and commandment, Good Lord! deliver us!*⁵ Tenderness is the first mark of the touch of grace, when the heart becomes sensible of its own insensibility, and contrite on account of its own hardness. 'Nothing,' said Jerome, in a letter to a friend, 'makes my heart sadder, than that nothing makes it sad.' But when "the plague of our own heart" begins to be "known,"⁶ and becomes matter of confession, humiliation, and prayer; the promise of "a new heart," is as life from the dead.⁷ The subject of this promise *delights in God's law*; and this, amidst the sometimes overwhelming power of natural corruption, gives a satisfactory witness of a change "from death unto life."

Christian! can you daily witness the wretched condition of the ungodly, without the constraining recollection of humiliation and love? What sovereign grace, that the Lord of glory should have set his love upon one so vile!⁸ What mighty power to have raised my insensible heart to that *delight in his law*, which conforms me to the image of his dear Son!⁹ Deeply would I "abhor myself;" and gladly would I acknowledge, that the service of ten thousand hearts would be a poor return for such unmerited love. What, O "what shall I render to the Lord!"¹⁰ Prayer for them who are still lying in death—praise for myself quickened from death. But what can give the vital breath, pulse, feeling, and motion? "Come from the four winds, O breath; and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."¹¹

Let us apply, for the purpose of daily self-examination, this description of the heart, either as given up to its natural insensibility, or as cast into the new mould of "*delight in the law of God.*" Such an examination will prove to us, how much even renewed souls need the transforming, softening influences of grace. "The deceitfulness of sin hardens the heart"¹² to its original character, "*as fat as grease,*" unfeeling, incapable of impression, without a divine

¹ Tim. iv. 2.² Eph. iv. 18, 19.³ Ps. lxxviii. 66, P. T.⁴ Isa. vi. 9, 10.⁵ Litany.⁶ 1 Kings viii. 38.⁷ Ezek. xxxvi. 26.⁸ Eph. ii. 4, 5.⁹ See Ps. xl. 8.¹⁰ Ps. cxvii. 12.¹¹ Ezek. xxxvii. 9.¹² Heb. iii. 13

touch. O Lord, let not my heart be unvisited for one day, one hour, by that melting energy of love, which first made me feel, and constrained me to love.

71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

IF I mark in myself any difference from the ungodly—if I can feel that my natural insensibility is yielding to the influence of grace—if I am enabled to “*delight in God’s law*,” which before I had neglected as a “strange thing,”¹ if this softening transformation² has been wrought in the school of affliction; let me thankfully acknowledge, “*It is good for me that I have been afflicted.*” None indeed but the Lord’s scholars can know the benefit of this school, and this teaching. The first lessons are usually learned under the power of the words pricking and piercing the heart; yet issuing in joyous good.³ All special lessons afterward will probably be learned here.⁴ ‘I never,’ said Luther, ‘knew the meaning of God’s word, until I came into affliction. I have always found it one of my best schoolmasters.’⁵ This teaching marks the sanctified from the un-sanctified cross, explaining many a hard text, and sealing many a precious promise—the rod expounding the word, and the Divine Teacher effectually applying both.

Indeed, but for this discipline we should miss much of the meaning and spiritual blessing of the word. For how can we have any experimental acquaintance with the promises of God, under those circumstances, for which the promises are made? When, for example, but in the day of trouble, could we understand the full mercy of such a gracious word, “*Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*”⁶ And how much more profitable is this experimental learning than mere human instruction! When therefore we pray for a clearer apprehension and interest in the blessed book, and for a deeper experience of its power upon our hearts; we are in fact often unconsciously supplicating for the chastening rod of our Father’s love. For it is the man “whom the Lord chasteneth, that he “teacheth out of his law.”⁷ Peter indeed, when on the mount of transfigura-

¹ Hosea viii. 12.

² Acts ii. 37—47; xvi. 27—34.

² Job xxiii. 16.

⁴ See Job xxxvi. 8—10.

⁵ On another occasion, referring to some spiritual temptation on the morning of the preceding day, he added to a friend (Justin Jonas), “Doctor, I must mark the day; I was yesterday at school.” Milner v. 481. In one of his works, he most accurately calls affliction “the theology of Christians”—“*theologium Christianorum.*” To the same purport is the testimony of a learned French divine and tried saint of God—“I have learned more divinity,” said Dr. Rivet, confessing to God of his last days of affliction—“in these ten days that thou art come to visit me, than I did in fifty years before. Thou hast brought me to myself. ‘Before I was afflicted I went astray,’ and was in the world; but now I am conversant in the school of my God; and he teacheth me after another manner than all those doctors, in reading whom I spent so much time.”—*Middleton’s Biog. Evan.* iii. 238.

⁶ Psalm l. 15.

⁷ Psalm xciv. 12. The use of the word *παιδεύω* in the acceptation of chastening (LXX. in this verse, and Heb. xii. 5.) is remarkable, as describing literally the instruction, by which a child is trained to the acquisition of useful knowledge, which, however, not be-

tion, said, "*It is good* for us to be here. Let us build here three tabernacles." Here let us abide in a state of comfort, indulgence, and sunshine. But well was it added by the sacred historian, "Not knowing what he said."¹ The judgment of David was far more correct, when he pronounced, that "*it was good for him that he had been afflicted.*" For so often are we convicted of inattention to the voice of the Lord—so often do we find ourselves looking back upon forsaken Sodom, or lingering in the plains, instead of pressing onward to Zoar,² that the indulgence of our own liberty would shortly hurry us along the pathway of destruction. Alas! often do we feel the spirit of prayer to be quenched for a season by "a heart overcharged with the cares of this life"³—or by the overprizing of some lawful comfort—or by a temper inconsistent with our Christian profession—or by an undue confidence in the flesh. And at such season of backsliding, we must count among our choicest mercies, the gracious discipline, by which the Lord schools us with the cross, "*that we may learn His statutes.*"

After all, however, this must be a paradox to the unenlightened man. He can only "count it" all grief, not "*all joy*, when he falls into divers temptations."⁴ His testimony is—It is evil—not *it is good for me that I have been afflicted.* And even God's children, as we have before remarked, do not always take up this word while smarting under the rod. The common picture of happiness is freedom from trouble, not, as Scripture describes it,⁵ the portion of trouble. Yet how true is God's judgment, when it is the very end of affliction to remove the source of all trouble,⁶ and consequently to secure—not to destroy—solid happiness. Yet we must determine the standard of real good by its opposition—not its accordance—to our own fancy or indulgence. The promise of "every good thing" may be fulfilled by a plentiful cup of affliction.⁷ Present evil may be "working together for" ultimate "good."⁸ Let God take his own way with us.⁹ Let us interpret his providences by his covenant¹⁰—his means by his end,¹¹ and instead of fainting under the sharpness of his rod, earnestly desire the improvement of it.

Are you, then, tried believer, disposed to regret the lessons you have already learned in this school? Or have you purchased them at too dear a cost? Do you grieve over the bleedings of a contrite heart, that have brought you under the care of the healing physician? Or could you by any other way have obtained so rich a knowledge of his love, or have been trained to such implicit obedience to his will? As Jesus, "though he were a Son, yet learned obedience by the things that he suffered;"¹² so may we "rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of his sufferings,"¹³ and be thankful to learn the same obedience, as the evidence and fruit of our conformity to him.

ing generally affected without chastening, accounts for the use of the word, to mark the discipline which usually attends instruction.

¹ Luke ix. 33.

² Compare Gen. xix. 17—23.

⁴ Luke xxi. 34.

⁴ James i. 2.

⁵ Job v. 17.

⁶ Isa. xxvii. 9.

³ Ps. xxxiv. 10, 19.

⁸ Rom. viii. 28. Comp. Jer. xxiv. 5.

⁹ Ib. xxix. 11.

John xvi. 6, 7.

¹⁰ Gen. xxxii. 10—12.

¹¹ James v. 11.

¹² Heb. v. 8.

¹³ 1 Peter iv. 13.

The Lord save us from the greatest of all afflictions, an affliction lost! "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited."² "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."³ A call to tremble and repent, to watch and pray, and "turn to him that smiteth us!"⁴

Oh! is there one of that countless throng surrounding the everlasting throne, who has not sung, "*It is good for me that I have been afflicted?*" "And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which *came out of great tribulation*, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."⁵

72. *The law of thy mouth is better unto me, than thousands of gold and silver.*

WELL might David acknowledge the benefit of *affliction*, since he had thus "*learned in God's statutes*" something that was "*better to him than thousands of gold and silver.*" This was indeed an enlightened judgment for one to form, who had so small a part of "*the law of God's mouth,*" and so large a portion of this world's treasure. And yet, if we study only his book of Psalms to know the important uses and privileges of *this law*, and his son's book of Ecclesiastes, to discover the real value of paltry *gold and silver*,⁶ we shall, under Divine teaching, be led to make the same estimate for ourselves. Yes, believer, with the same, or rather with far higher delight than the miser calculates his "*thousands of gold and silver,*" do you tell out the precious contents of *the law of your God*. After having endeavored in vain to count the "*thousands*" in your treasure, one single name sums up their value—"the unsearchable riches of Christ."⁷ Would not the smallest spot of ground be estimated at "*thousands of gold and silver,*" were it known to conceal under its surface a mine of inexhaustible treasure? This it is that makes the word so inestimable. It is the field of the "*hidden treasure.*" "The pearl of great price"⁸ is known to be concealed here. You would not therefore part with one leaf of your Bible for all the "*thousands of gold and silver.*" You know yourself to be in possession of the substance—you have found all besides to be a shadow. "I lead," saith the Saviour, "in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment; *that I may cause them that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.*"⁹ The grand motive therefore in "*searching the Scriptures*" is because "*they testify of Christ.*"¹⁰ A sinner has but one want—a Saviour. A believer has but one desire—to "*know and win Christ.*"¹¹ With a "*single eye,*" therefore, intent upon one point, he studies this blessed

¹ Comp. 1 Kings xiii. 33. ² Chron. xxviii. 22.

² Jer. vi. 8.

³ Prov. xix. 1.

⁴ Isaiah ix. 13.

⁵ Rev. vii. 13, 14.

⁶ Eccles. v. 9—10; vi. 1, 2.

⁷ Eph. iii. 8.

⁸ Matt. xiii. 44—46.

⁹ Prov. viii. 20—21.

¹⁰ John v. 39.

¹¹ Phil. iii. 8—10.

book. "With unveiled face he beholds in this glass the glory of the Lord;"¹ and no arithmetic can compute the price of that, which is now unspeakably *better to him than* the treasures of the earth.

Christian! bear your testimony to your supreme delight in the book of God. You have here opened the surface of much intellectual interest and solid instruction. But it is the joy that you have found in the revelation of the Saviour, in his commands, in his promises, in his ways, that leads you to exclaim, "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold!"² Yes, indeed—every promise—every declaration—centering in him, is a pearl; and the word of God is full of these precious pearls. If then they be the richest, who have the best and the largest treasure, those who have most of the word in their hearts—not those who have most of the world in their possession—are justly entitled to this pre-eminence. "Let then the word of Christ dwell in us *richly* in all wisdom."³ For those who are rich in this heavenly treasure are men of substance indeed.

True—this is a correct estimate of the worth of God's law—*better than this world's treasure*. But is it *better to me*? Is this my decided choice? How many will inconsiderately acknowledge its supreme value, while they yet hesitate to relinquish even a scanty morsel of earth for an interest in it! Do I then habitually prefer "*this law of God's mouth*" to every worldly advantage; am I ready to forego every selfish consideration,⁴ if it may only be the means of uniting my heart more closely to the Book of God? If this be not my practical conviction, I fear I have not yet opened the mine. But if I can assent to this declaration of the man of God, I have made a far more glorious discovery than Archimides; and therefore may take up his expression of joyful surprise—"I have found it! I have found it!" What? That which the world could never have given me—that which the world can never deprive me of.

Yet how affecting is it to see men poor in the midst of great riches! Often in the world we see the possessor of a large treasure—without a heart to enjoy it—virtually therefore a pauper. Oftener still in the Church do we see professors (may it not be so with some of us?) with their Bibles in their hands—yet poor even with the external interest in its "unsearchable riches." Often also do we observe a want of value for *the whole law* or revelation of God's mouth. Some parts are highly honored to the depreciation of the rest. But let it be remembered, that the whole of Scripture is "Scripture given by inspiration of God, and *therefore* profitable" for its appointed end.⁵ Oh! beware of resting satisfied with a scanty stock. How rich should we be, should we ponder only one

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

² Psalm xix. 10.

³ Col. iii. 16.

⁴ A Jewish Rabbi, when induced by the prospect of a lucrative situation to fix his settlement in a place *where there was no synagogue*, is said to have resisted the temptation by the recollection of this verse. Poli Synopsis—in loco. A reproof to Christians, who, in "choosing the bounds of their habitation," have not always eyed their Master's rule. Matt. vi. 33.

⁵ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

word of *the law* each day with prayerful meditation ! As you value your progress and peace in the ways of God—as you have an eye to your Christian perfection—put away that ruinous thought—true as an encouragement to the weak,¹ but false as an excuse to the slothful²—that a little knowledge is sufficient to carry us to heaven.

And—Lord—help me to prize *the law* as coming from “*thy mouth*.”³ Let it be for ever written upon my heart. Let me be daily exploring my hidden treasures. Let me be enriching myself and all around me with a present possession and interest in these heavenly blessings.

P A R T X .

73. *Thy hands have made me and fashioned me : give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.*

IN the vast universe of wonder, man is the greatest wonder—the noblest work of God. A council of the Sacred Trinity was held respecting his creation—“God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”⁴ Every part of creation bears the impress of God. Man—man alone—bears his image, his likeness. Everywhere we see his track—his footsteps. Here we behold his face. What an amazing thought, that the three Eternal subsistents in the glorious Godhead, should have united in gracious design and operation towards the dust of the earth ! But thus man was formed—thus was he raised out of his parent dust, from this low original, to be the living temple and habitation of Divine glory—a being full of God. The first moment that he opened his eyes to behold the light and beauty of the new-made world, the Lord separated him for his own service, to receive the continual supply of his own life. His body was fitted as a tabernacle for his soul, “curiously wrought” by the hand of God ; and all its parts and “members written in his book, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.” Most naturally therefore does the contemplation of this “perfection of beauty” raise the adoring mind upward—“I will praise thee ; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made ; marvellous are thy works ; and that my soul knoweth right well.”⁵ “*Thy hands have made me and fashioned me.*”

Could we suppose that man was framed to eat, to sleep, and to die—that, after taking a few turns upon the grand walk of life, he

¹ Zech. iv. 10.

² Prov. xiii. 4.

³ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

⁴ Gen. i. 26.

⁵ Psalm cxxxix. 14—16.

was to descend into the world of eternal silence, we might well ask the question of God—"Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?"¹ But the first awakening of man from his death-like sleep enlightens him in the right knowledge of the end of his creation. If I am conscious of being the workmanship of God, I shall feel my relationship to him, and the responsibility of acting according to it. I would plead then this relation before him in asking for light, life, and love. I cannot serve thee as a creature, except I be made a new creature. Give me a spiritual being, without which my natural being cannot glorify thee. Thou hast indeed "curiously wrought" my frame; but sin has marred all. Make me thy spiritual "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus."² "*Give me understanding*"—spiritual knowledge, "*that I may learn thy commandments*"—"Renew a right spirit within me."³

But the natural man feels no need of this prayer. No, he is puffed up in his own wisdom. He cannot receive the divine testimony, which levels him, while he "understandeth not," with "the beasts that perish,"⁴ and tells him, that he must "become a fool, that he may be wise."⁵ But should he ever know his new state of existence, he will offer up this prayer eagerly and frequently; and every step of his way heavenward he will feel increasing need of Divine "wisdom and spiritual understanding."

How does the song of heaven remind us of this end of our creation!—"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor, and power; for thou hast created all things; and for thy pleasure they are and were created."⁶ In harmony with this song we must acknowledge, that the "Lord hath made all things for himself"⁷—that he "created all things for his glory."⁸ And the recollection that he "created us by Jesus Christ,"⁹ brings before us the grand work of redemption, and the work of the new creation consequent upon it. He who created us in his own image, when that image was lost, that he might not lose his property in us, put a fresh seal upon his natural right, and "purchased us with his own blood." Oh! let us not be insensible to this constraining motive to "*learn his commandments*." "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."¹⁰

74. *They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.*

How cheering is the sight of a man of God! How refreshing his converse! How satisfactory and enlivening is the exhibition of his faith! The goodness of God to one becomes thus the joy and comfort of all. What an excitement is this to close communion with our God, that the light which we thus receive will shine on those around us! What a comfort will it be, even in our own

¹ Ps. lxxxix. 47.

² Eph. ii. 10.

³ Ps. li. 10.

⁴ Ib. xlix. 20.

⁵ 1 Cor. iii. 18.

⁶ Rev. iv. 11.

⁷ Prov. xvi. 4.

⁸ Isa. xliiii. 7.

⁹ Eph. iii. 9. Col. i. 16. John i. 1—3.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

hour of temptation, that the hope which we may then be enabled to maintain in the word of God, shall prove the stay, not only of our own souls, but of the Lord's people! Many a desponding Christian, oppressed with such fears as this—"I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul,"¹—when he hears of one and another exercised in the same trials, and who have "*hoped in God's word,*" and have not been disappointed, "*will be glad when he sees them.*" Thus David recorded his conflicts, that we may not despair of our own; and his triumphs, that "in the name of our God we might set up our banners"²—"I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, upon the Lord."³ Thus also, under affliction, he was comforted with the thought of comforting others with the history of his own experience—"My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof and be glad. O praise the Lord with me, and let us magnify his name together. He hath put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto our God. Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name; the righteous shall compass me about, for thou shalt deal bountifully with me."⁴

In this view, the believer, who has been "sifted in the sieve" of temptation, without the least "grain" of faith or hope "falling upon the earth,"⁵ stands forth as a monument of the Lord's faithfulness, to "strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, and to say to them that are of a feeble heart, Be strong, fear not."⁶ Those that are "fearful, and of little faith," "*are glad when they see him.*" They "thank God" for him, and "take courage"⁷ for themselves. What a motive is this to keep us from despondency; that instead of destroying, by our unbelief, those who are already "cast down," we may enjoy the privilege of upholding their confidence, and ministering to their comfort! And how should the weak and distressed seek for and prize the society of those, who have been instructed by the discipline of the Lord's school!

Believer! what have you to tell to your discouraged brethren of the faithfulness of your God? Cannot you put courage into their hearts, by declaring that you have never been "ashamed of your hope?" Cannot you tell them from your own experience, that Jesus "is for a foundation-stone, a tried stone, a sure foundation?"⁸ Cannot you show them, that, because he has borne the burden of their sins, he is able to "bear their griefs, and to carry their sorrows?"⁹ that you have tried him, and that you have found him so? Oh! be animated to know more of Christ yourself; let your hope in him be strengthened, that you may cause gladness in the hearts of those *that see you*; so that "whether you be afflicted, or

¹ 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.² Psalm xx. 5.³ Ib. xxvii. 13, 14.⁴ Ib. xxiv. 2, 3; xl. 3; cxlii. 7. Compare also lxix. 30—32.⁵ Amos ix. 9.⁶ Isa. xxxv. 3, 4.⁷ Acts xxviii. 15.⁸ Isa. xxvi. 16.⁹ Ib. liii. 4.

whether you be comforted, it may be for their consolation and salvation."¹

But O my God! how much cause have I for shame, that I impart so little of thy glorious light to those around me. Perhaps some poor trembling sinner "*has been glad when he saw me,*" hoping to hear something of the Saviour from my lips, and has found me straitened, and cold, and dumb. Oh! that I may be so "*filled with the Spirit,*" so experienced in thy heavenly ways, that I may invite "*all that fear thee to come to me,*" that I may "*tell them what thou hast done for my soul;*"² so that, "*when men are cast down, they may say, There is lifting up.*"³

75. *I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.*

THIS is the Christian's acknowledgment—fully satisfied with the dispensations of God. This is his confidence—so invigorating to his own soul—so cheering to the Church. The Lord's dealings are called *his judgments*—not as having judicial curses, but as the acts of his justice in the chastening of sin.⁴ Perhaps also—as the administration of his wise judgment in their measure and application.⁵ But here is not only the confession of the Lord's general judgment, but of his especial *faithfulness* to himself. And this he *knew*—not from the dictates of the flesh, (which would have given a contrary verdict,) but from the testimony of the word,⁶ and the witness of his own experience.⁷ It could not be doubted—much less denied—'*I know, O Lord, that thy rules of proceeding are agreeable to thy perfect justice and wisdom; and I am equally satisfied, that the afflictions that thou hast laid upon me from time to time, are only to fulfil thy gracious and faithful promise of making me eternally happy in thyself.*' Blessed fruit of affliction! when we can thus "*see the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy*"—that his "*thoughts towards us are thoughts of peace, and not of evil!*"⁸ "*The patience and faith of the saints*" teach this difficult but most consoling lesson in deciphering the mysterious lines in God's providence.

The child of God, under the severest chastisement, must acknowledge justice. Our gracious reward is always more—our "*punishment always less, than our iniquities deserve.*"⁹ "*Wherefore should a living man complain?*"¹⁰ In trouble, indeed—but not in hell. If he complain, let it be of none but himself, and his own wayward choice. *I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right*—and who can doubt the wisdom? Who would charge the operator with cruelty, in cutting out the proud flesh that was bringing death upon the man? Who would not acknowledge the *right judgment* of his piercing work? Thus, when the Lord's painful work separates us from our sins, weans us from the world, and

¹ 2 Cor. i. 6.

² Psalm lxxvi. 16.

³ Job xxii. 29.

⁴ 1 Peter iv. 17.

⁵ Jer. x. 24. Comp. Isa. xxvii. 8.

⁶ Deut. xxxii. 4.

⁷ Verse 137; exlv. 17.

⁸ James v. 11. Jer. xxix. 11.

⁹ Ezra ix. 13. Comp. Job xi. 6.

¹⁰ Lam. iii. 39.

brings us nearer to himself, what remains for us, but thankfully to acknowledge his righteousness and truth? Unbelief is put to rebuke; and we, of any suspicion "that God has forgotten to be gracious," must confess, "This is our infirmity."

This assurance of the Lord's perfect justice, wisdom, and intimate knowledge of our respective cases, leads us to yield to his appointments in dutiful silence. Thus Aaron, under his most afflictive domestic calamity, "held his peace."² Job under a similar dispensation was enabled to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!"³ Eli's language in the same trial was, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good."⁴ David hushed his impatient spirit, "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." And when Shimei cursed him, he said, "Let him alone; let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him."⁵ The Shunammite, in the meek resignation of faith, acknowledged, "It is well."⁶ Hezekiah kissed the rod, while it was smiting him to the dust, "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken."⁷ Thus uniform is the language of the Lord's people under chastisement, *I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right.*

But the confession of justice may be mere natural conviction.⁸ Faith goes further, and speaks of *faithfulness*. David not only acknowledges God's right to deal with him as he saw fit, and even his wisdom in dealing with him as he actually had done, but his *faithfulness in afflicting*—not his faithfulness, *though he afflicted*—but *in afflicting him*; not as if it were consistent with his love, but as the fruit of his love. It is not enough, to justify God. What abundant cause is there to praise him! It is not enough to forbear to murmur. How exciting is the display of *his faithfulness* and love! Yes—the trials appointed for us are none else than the faithful performance of his everlasting engagements. And to this cause we may always trace (and it is our privilege to believe it, where we cannot *visibly* trace it) the reason of much that is painful to the flesh.⁹ Let us only mark its gracious effects in our restoration¹⁰—instruction¹¹—healing of our backslidings,¹² and the continual purging of sins¹³—and then say, 'Is not the *faithfulness* of God gloriously displayed?' The Philistines could not understand Samson's riddle—how "Meat could come out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong."¹⁴ As little can the world comprehend the fruitfulness of the Christian's trials; how his gracious Lord sweetens to him the bitter waters of Marah,¹⁵ and makes the cross not so much the punishment, as the remedy of sin. He finds therefore no inclination, and he feels that he has no interest in

¹ Psalm lxxvii. 7—10.

² Lev. x. 1—3.

³ Job i. 21. Comp. ii. 10.

⁴ 1 Sam. iii. 18.

⁵ Psalm xxxix. 9. 2 Sam. xvi. 11, 12.

⁶ 2 Kings iv. 26.

⁷ Isa. xxxix. 8.

⁸ Exod. ix. 27. Judges i, 7. 2 Chron. xii. 6.

⁹ Psalm lxxxix. 30—32. Deut. viii. 16. Comp. Psalm cvii. 43.

¹⁰ Verse 67, and texts referred to on that verse.

¹¹ Verse 71, and texts.

¹² Hosea ii. 6, 7, 14.

¹³ Isa. xxvii. 9; xlvi. 10. Zech. xiii. 9. John xv. 2.

¹⁴ Judges xiv. 14.

¹⁵ See Exodus xv. 23—25.

having any change made in the Lord's appointments, painful as they may be to the flesh. He readily acknowledges that his merciful designs could not have been accomplished in any other way; while under trials many sweet tokens of love are vouchsafed, which, under circumstances of outward prosperity, could not have been received with the same gratitude and delight.

You that are living at ease in the indulgence of what this poor world can afford, how little does the Christian envy your portion! How surely in some future day will you be taught by experience to envy his! The world's riches are daily becoming poorer, and its pleasures more tasteless. And what will they be, and how will they appear, when eternity is at hand! Whereas affliction is the special token of our Father's love,¹ conformity to the image of Jesus, and preparation for his service and kingdom. It is the only blessing that the Lord gives, without requiring us to ask for it.² We receive it therefore as promised, not as threatened; and when "the peaceable fruits of righteousness,"³ which it worketh in God's time and way, spring up in our hearts, humbly and gratefully will we acknowledge the *righteousness* of his "*judgments*," and the "*faithfulness*" of his corrections.

76. *Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.*

WHAT! does the Psalmist then seek his comfort from the very hand that strikes him? This is genuine faith, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."⁴ The very arm that seems to be uplifted for my destruction, shall be to me the arm of salvation.

Several of the preceding verses have spoken of affliction.⁵ The Psalmist now prays for alleviation under it. But of what kind? He does not "beseech the Lord, that it might depart from him."⁶ No. His repeated acknowledgments of the supports vouchsafed under it, and the benefits he had derived from it, had reconciled him to commit its measure⁷ and continuance to the Lord. All that he needs, and all that he asks for, is, a sense of his "*merciful kindness*" upon his soul. Thus he submits to his justice in accumulated trials, and expects consolation under them solely upon the ground of his free favor. Indeed it is hard to hold on under protracted affliction without this precious support. Patience may restrain murmuring—but a sense of love alone keeps from fainting. Holiness is our service—affliction is our exercise—*comfort* is our gracious reward. All the candles in the world, in the absence of the sun, can never make the day. The whole earth in its brightest visions of fancy, destitute of the Lord's love, can never cheer nor revive the

¹ Heb. xii. 6. Rev. iii. 19.

² Phil. i. 29. Lord Bacon somewhere remarks, "that, however temporal prosperity may have been promised to the Church under the Old Testament; affliction, and suffering, and trial, are the promises made to the Church under the Gospel dispensation."

³ Such as patience, experience, hope—the work of tribulation. Heb. xii. 11, with Rom. v. 3—5.

⁴ Job xiii. 15.

⁵ Verses 67, 71, 75.

⁶ 2 Cor. xii. 8.

⁷ Jer. x. 24.

soul. Indeed it matters little where we are, or what we have. In the fulness of refreshing ordinances, unless the Lord meets us, and blesses us with his "*merciful kindness for our comfort*," it is "a thirsty land, where no water is." Absalom might as well have been at Geshur as at Jerusalem, so long as he "saw not the king's face."¹ Nothing that the Lord "gives us richly to enjoy," will satisfy, if this source of refreshment be withheld. 'The worldling's inquiry is—"who will show us any good?" The Christian forms his answer into a prayer—"Lord! lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me."² "*Let thy merciful kindness be for my comfort.*" This gives the enjoyment of every real good, and supplies the place of every fancied good. It is a blessing that never cloy, and will never end: and every fresh taste quenches the thirst for earthly pleasures. "Whosoever drinketh of this water"—said our Divine Saviour—"shall thirst again. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst!"³ "Delight thyself in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."⁴

But, reader, do you wish to realize this comfort? Then seek to approach your God by the only way of access. Learn to contemplate him in the only glass in which a God of love is seen—"in the face of Jesus Christ."⁵ Guard against looking for comfort from any other source. Beware especially of that satisfaction in creature cisterns, which draws you away from "the fountain of living waters."⁶ Learn also to prize this comfort supremely, and not to be content without some enjoyment, or even with a scanty measure of enjoyment; but rather let every day's refreshment be made a step for desiring and attaining renewed and sweeter refreshment for tomorrow. Some, however, appear to look at David's experience, as if *at present* they could hardly expect to reach its happiness: and so they go on in a low, depressed, and almost sullen state, refusing the privileges, which are as freely offered to them as to others. But such a state of mind is highly dishonorable to God. Let them earnestly plead their interest in the word of promise, "*According to thy word unto thy servant.*" Let them lay their fingers upon one or all of the promises of their God. Let them spread before the Lord his own hand-writing and seals; and their Saviour hath said, "According to your faith be it unto you."⁷ "The king is held in

¹ Compare 2 Sam. xiv. 23, 24.

² Psalm iv. 6.

³ John iv. 13, 14.

⁴ Psalm xxxvii. 4.

⁵ 2 Cor. iv. 6. Compare John xiv. 6.

⁶ Jer. ii. 13.

⁷ Matt. ix. 29. The writer cannot forbear indulging himself with a transcript of the prayers of Monica, Augustine's mother, as a beautiful example of this earnestness and simplicity of faith in pleading the promises of the word—"Lord, these promises were made to be made good to some, and, why not to me? I hunger; I need; I thirst; I wait. Here is thy hand-writing in thy word; and in the last sacrament, I had thy seal affixed to it. I am resolved to be as importunate till I have obtained, and as thankful afterwards, as by thy grace I shall be enabled; being convinced that I am utterly lost and undone, if thou hearest not the desires of the humble; and if thou dost hear and grant, I am so well acquainted with myself and with my own heart, that I have nothing to glory in; but I shall wholly glory in the Lord; and I do resolve and believe, that I shall to all eternity celebrate and magnify the riches of thy grace. Thy promises are the discoveries of thy purposes, and vouchsafed as materials for our prayers; and in my supplications I am resolved every day to present and tender them back to thee; and if thou

the galleries;"¹ and, if he should "make as though he would go farther," he is willing that we should "constrain him, saying, Abide with us."² No veil now but the veil of unbelief need hinder us from seeing an unclouded, everlasting smile of "*merciful kindness*" upon our heavenly Father's reconciled face. Only let us see to it, that he is the first, the habitual object of our contemplation, the satisfying well-spring of our delight—that he is the one desire, to which ever other is subordinate, and in which every other is absorbed.

Lord Jesus! I would seek for a renewed enjoyment in "*thy merciful kindness.*" I would not forget that it was this that brought thee down from heaven—that led thee to endure the death of the cross—that has washed me in thy precious blood—that visits me with many endearing tokens of thy love. O let all my days be spent in the sense of this "*merciful kindness for my comfort,*" and in rendering to thee the unworthy returns of grateful, filial service.

77. *Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live; for thy law is my delight.*

SIN is no light trouble to the man of God. Mercy, therefore, is to him no common blessing. Never can he have—never can he ask enough. Hence his repeated cries. Mercy brought him out of sin and misery. Mercy keeps—holds him on—assures him to the end.³ Every blessing comes in the way of mercy.⁴ The most careful "walker according to the Gospel rule,"⁵ needs mercy. The elect are "vessels of mercy"⁶—filled up to the brim with mercy. The crown of glory at last is received at the hands of mercy.⁷

The distinguishing character of God is, that his mercies are *tender mercies*⁸—a father's pitying⁹—yearning¹⁰—*mercies*. When his returning prodigal expected probably upbraiding looks, if not a frown of banishment, how did these *tender mercies* bring, not only his sins, but also his very confessions in the depths of the sea, and welcome him without a cloud to his forsaken home!¹¹ The same *tender* consideration puts away from his children all anxiety respecting "what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or wherewithal they shall be clothed."¹² As a Father, he also "chasteneth"¹³ them—"he suffereth their manners"¹⁴—he "spareth them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him;"¹⁵—and finally, he determin-

wilt have regard to them, and appear to be a 'God of truth' to my soul; a poor creature, that hath long feared to burn in hell for hypocrisy, will be secured and made happy for ever. I am resolved to wait upon thee, and to cast down my soul upon thee in this way; and thou hast assured me, thou art a 'God of judgment.' Thou didst promise in judgment. 'Thou knewest what thou didst in making such promises; and thou wilt be a 'God of judgment;' thou knowest when and where to make them good; and thou hast pronounced—'Blessed are all they that wait for thee.' On thee I will wait, and for this blessing I will hope and look."

¹ Can. vii. 5; also vi. 5.

² Compare Luke xxiv. 28, 29, with Gen. xxxii. 26—29. Compare the invitation given, Can. iv. 16, instantly accepted, v. 1.

³ Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

⁴ Ib. cxxxvi. 23—25.

⁵ Gal. vi. 16.

⁶ Rom. ix. 23.

⁷ Matthew xxv. 34.

⁸ Psalm li. 1; lxxix. 8.

⁹ Ib. ciii. 13.

¹⁰ Hosea xi. 8. Jer. xxxi. 20.

¹¹ Compare Luke xv. 20—24.

¹² Matt. vi. 25—34.

¹³ Deut. viii. 5.

¹⁴ Acts xiii. 18.

¹⁵ Mal. iii. 17.

eth respecting each of them by an act of sovereign power—"Thou shalt call me, My Father, and shalt not depart from me."¹ In a yet more endearing character he speaks—"As one whom *his mother comforteth*, so will I comfort you. They may forget; yet will I not forget thee."²

Yet have we no just apprehension of these *tender mercies*, unless they *come unto us*. In the midst of the wide distribution, let me claim my interest. *Let them come unto me.*³ Praised be God! the way is open to me. The mere report is unfruitful. I cannot speak of them with glow and unction. The application of them is *life*—not the mere breathing of spiritual existence, but the life of my life—the living principle of devotedness and enjoyment—living to and for God in every form and sphere, in every hour and action of the day; my feebleness becoming strength in the Lord; "walking up and down in his name."⁴ This truly is "reigning in life;"⁵ rising to more of its honor and dignity, and reaching forth to more of its excellence and happiness.

But let us not lose sight of the abundant overflowing spring, from which our life is maintained. In Christ was life;⁶ and he "came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly."⁷ There can be, therefore, no exercises of life without a vital union to Christ—the source of life. Shall we then give up the hope of believing in Christ, till we feel the influence of this spiritual principle? This would be indeed like refusing to abide in the vine, till we could bring forth fruit; whereas the branch, while separated from the vine, must ever be fruitless and withered.⁸ *We must receive life from Christ, not bring it to him.* Faith implants us in him; and "Christ dwelling in the heart by faith" becomes the life of the soul, animating it in the ways of God.⁹

This life, therefore, will manifest itself in *delight in God's law*. We shall not be satisfied to live upon the mere surface of the Gospel (which is barren and unproductive, as any other surface, in spiritual usefulness,) but we shall search into its hidden treasures, and draw forth its real life and consolation. This "*delight*" will furnish a plea for our use at the throne of grace. 'If this is the fruit and acting of the life of thine own implanting, Lord! cherish it. Let me live by the influence of "*thy tender mercies.*" I venture to plead my *delight in thy law*, as an evidence of my adoption into thy family. And, therefore, I would renew my plea and my petition—"Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that" my life may be not only existence, but enjoyment—the beginning, the earnest of the everlasting life and bliss of heaven.²

78. *Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.*

THE prophecy with which God himself condescended to open the

¹ Jer. iii. 19.

² Isa. lxvi. 13; xlix. 15.

³ Verse 41.

⁴ Zech. x. 12.

⁵ Rom. v. 17.

⁶ John i. 4.

⁷ Ib. x. 10.

⁸ Ib. xv. 4—6.

⁹ Compare Gal. ii. 20, with Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

history of the Church, has ever since been in the course of accomplishment.¹ "Enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman," has been the prevailing character and course of the world. "An unjust man is an abomination to the just; and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked."² David, however, prayed for the confusion of his enemies,—not in a vindictive spirit, as if thirsting for their destruction; but as opening the way for his own more free service of God,³ and as a chastening, that might eventually turn to their salvation—"Fill their faces with shame, *that they may seek thy name, O Lord.*"⁴ That his prayer was the expression of his tender compassion, rather than of resentful feeling, is sufficiently evident from his affectionate weeping concern for their immortal interests.⁵ Prayers of the same deprecating character dropped from the lips of the gentle and compassionate Saviour:⁶ while the objects of his awful deprecations were interested in the most yearning sympathies of his heart.⁷ A regard also for the honor of God dictated this prayer. David knew that the malice of his enemies against him was only the working of their enmity against God; that it was not so much him that they hated and persecuted, as God in him. And therefore as a servant of God he could appeal—"Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved at those that rise up against thee? *I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies.*"⁸ The followers of a despised Saviour must indeed expect to be sorely distressed with the *perverseness of the proud*. But when, like their Master, they can testify that it is "*without a cause,*"⁹ how cheering are their Master's words! "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven."¹⁰

And have you, reader, been exercised with trials from an ungodly world? Has the derision of the proud, or the slight or ill-treatment of the ungodly, never excited revengeful feelings within? Have you always been enabled to set your Saviour's example before you, and, "in patience possessing your soul," to refer your cause to your Almighty Friend? "O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me."¹¹ Remember he has engaged to take up your cause—"Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them! *I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.*"¹²

But learn in the hour of trial where to go, and what to do. Go to the word of God for direction and support. "*Meditate in his precepts.*" There is often a hurry of mind in times of difficulty, which unhinges the soul from the simple exercise of faith. But habit brings practice, and steadiness, and simplicity, enabling us

¹ Gen. iii. 15. Compare Rev. xii. 17.

³ Verse 134.

⁴ Psalm lxxxiii. 16.

⁶ Psalm lxix. 21—28.

⁷ Comp. Matt. xxiii. 37.

⁹ lb. xxxv. 19; lxix. 4, with John xv. 25.

¹¹ Isaiah xxxviii. 14. Compare Psalm cxl. 12, 13.

² Prov. xxix. 27.

⁵ Verses 53, 136, 158.

⁸ Psalm cxxxix. 21, 22.

¹⁰ Matthew v. 11, 12.

¹² Luke xviii. 7, 8.

most sweetly to fix our hearts upon the word of God, and to apply its directions and encouragements to the present exigency. Our enemies fight against us with an arm of flesh. We resist them with the armor of the word of God. And how inestimably precious is the armor, refuge, strength, and consolation, here provided for us, against every effort to disturb our peace, "or separate our hearts from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

79. *Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.*

As the believer finds trouble from the world, he prays that he may find help from the Lord's people. The very sight of our Father's family is cheering. It brings not only fellowship but help. For the wise distribution of gifts in the body—each having his own gift—were ordained for the mutual help and sympathy of the several members.¹ It is painful therefore to see Christians often walking aloof from each other, and suffering coldness, distance, and mutual differences and distrust to divide them from their brethren. Who then will not pray that he who has the hearts of all his people in his hand, would "*turn the hearts of those that fear him, and know his testimonies,*" unto their brethren? It was the honor of Mordecia, that he was "accepted of the multitude of his brethren."² In the primitive Church, "Demetrius had good report of all men, and of the truth itself;"³ and the members of the Church generally "did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart; praising God, and *having favor with all the people.*"⁴ 'Then,' as Chrysostom exultingly exclaims, 'the Church was a little heaven.' Then they could say to each other,—“Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”⁵ and even their heathen neighbors were awed and constrained into the confession, "See how these Christians love one another."

Alas! that our Jerusalem should no longer exhibit the picture of a "city compact together"⁶—that so many "walls of partition" should separate brother from brother, so that our Zion has very rarely been exhibited in her "perfection of beauty," when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul."⁷ Prejudice and misconception divided Job from his friends.⁸ Want of forbearance cankered the union of the members of the Church of Rome,⁹ and even prevailed to separate chief friends—Paul and Barnabas.¹⁰ Diversity of sentiment injured the influence of brotherly love at Corinth.¹¹ And thus it has been in every suc-

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 7. Eph. iv. 15, 16.

³ John 12.

² Esther x. 3.

⁴ Acts ii. 46, 47.

⁵ Psalm cxxxiii. 1. Most truly catholic was the rule of the excellent Philip Henry, and most consistently exemplified in his Christian conduct, determining "in those things, in which all the people of God are agreed, to spend my zeal; and as for other things about which they differ, to walk according to the light God hath given me, and charitably to believe others to do so too."—Life, Williams's Edition, p. 127.

⁶ Psalm cxxii. 3.

⁷ Ib. l. 2, with Acts iv. 32.

⁸ Job. vi. 29.

⁹ Rom. xiv. xv. 1—7.

¹⁰ Acts xv. 37.

¹¹ 1 Cor. i. 10—12.

cessive age of the Church; so that the full answer to the Redeemer's prayer, and the grand display to the world of the Divine original of the Gospel, is yet to be manifested.¹ But as "the communion of saints" was the peculiar feature of primitive Christianity, and ever since has formed an article of her faith; in proportion as we return to the primitive standard, we shall hold closer fellowship with each other—as "members of one body"²—"considering one another, to provoke unto love and to good works"³—"bearing one another's burdens"⁴—and receiving one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God."⁵

Want of Christian self-denial presents the main hindrance to this "keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." But—admitting that some of the brethren are "weak in the faith" in comparison with ourselves—are we then to be 'rolling endlessly the returning stone,'⁶ obtruding always the same stumbling offence upon them?⁷ We are "not to please ourselves" in compelling them to adopt our views; but rather to "receive them, and bear their infirmities."⁸ Accursed be that charity, that is preserved by "the shipwreck of faith!" But though Scriptural truth must never be denied, there are times when it may be forborne. The Apostle "knew and was persuaded of the Lord Jesus, that there was nothing unclean of itself;"⁹ yet he would rather allow even the misconception of conscience, until clearer light should be given, than endanger the unity of the Church. Liberty must give place to love: and for himself, he would rather restrain himself from lawful indulgence, than hazard the safety of a weaker brother, or turn from one that loved his Saviour.¹⁰ Wherever, therefore, in the judgment of Christian charity we discover those "that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,"¹¹ we must be ready to give them our very hearts, to view them as brethren, as one with ourselves, and to welcome them in brotherly love, as those whom, with all their infirmities, Jesus "is not ashamed to call his brethren."¹² We must be ready to "*turn to them,*" as those "*that fear God, and have known his testimonies.*"

And does not the believer's anxiety for the company and assistance of the Lord's people rebuke Christian professors, who are far too closely linked to the society of the world? Surely, if the lovely attraction of many of its most avowed votaries can compensate for the absence of their Saviour's image, they can have but little relish for that heavenly enjoyment, which unites the children of God together in close and hallowed communion with God. And do we not see a proof of the deteriorating influence of this worldly spirit, in their readiness to feel disgust at the infirmities of the real brethren of the Lord, and to neglect the image of Christ in them, from the unsightliness of the garb, which may sometimes cover it?

¹ John xvii. 21.² 1 Cor. xii. 12—27.³ Heb. x. 24.⁴ Gal. vi. 2; v. 13.⁵ Rom. xv. 7.⁶ Morning Exercises, Oct. 1682.⁷ Rom. xiv. 1.⁸ Ib. xv. 1.⁹ Ib. xiv. 14.¹⁰ Ib. xiv. 13, 15. 1 Cor. viii. 13. Compare Phil. iii. 15, 16¹¹ Eph. vi. 24. Comp. 1 John iii. 14.¹² Heb. ii. 11, 12.

But let us mark the completeness of the Christian—combining the fear with the knowledge of God. Knowledge without fear would be self-confidence. Fear without knowledge would be bondage. But *the knowledge of his testimonies* connected with *an acquaintance with his ways*, moulds the character of men of God into the spirit of love; and qualifies them, “as fathers”¹ in the Gospel, to counsel the weak and inexperienced. Should we, however, be excluded from the privilege of their intercourse; or should they be prevented from “*turning unto us*,” may it not be the appointed means of leading us to a more simple dependence on Divine teaching and grace, and to a more blessed anticipation of our Father’s house in heaven, where all will be harmony, peace and love? ‘We shall carry truth and the knowledge of God to heaven with us; we shall carry purity thither, devotedness of soul to God and our Redeemer, divine love and joy, if we have their beginnings here, with whatsoever else of permanent excellence, that hath a settled, fixed seat and place in our souls now; and shall there have them in perfection. But do you think we shall carry strife to heaven? Shall we carry anger to heaven? Envyings, heart-burnings, animosities; shall we carry these to heaven with us? Let us labor to divest ourselves, and strike off from our spirits everything that shall not go with us to heaven, or is equally unsuitable to our end and way, that there may be nothing to obstruct and hinder our abundant entrance at length into the everlasting kingdom.’²

80. *Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.*

THE *perverseness of the proud* will be sure to put them to *shame*.³ As the preservative from this *shame*, David prays therefore for a *sound heart*—filled with solid principle—delivered into the mould of the word⁴—like the sacrifices of the law—entire for God.⁵ Often had he prayed for Divine teaching⁶—now he begs for *soundness in the Lord’s statutes*. How many “have made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience,”⁷ from an unsound heart! Ignorant of the spirituality of God’s requirements, and resting in an outward obedience, they falsely conceive themselves to be “alive without the law,”⁸ and, “touching the righteousness that is of the law, blameless.”⁹ Others go a little beyond the surface; while the want of “simplicity and godly sincerity,” of brokenness of heart, love to the Saviour, and dependence upon his grace, sooner or later discovers to their eternal confusion, that “the root of the matter is” not “in them.” “Their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust.” “Their goodness is as a morning cloud; and as the early dew it goeth away.”¹⁰ An unsound professor, like

¹ John ii. 13, 14.

² Howe’s Works, vol. iv. 126, 127—“It will be one of the felicities of heaven” (as Milner sweetly remarks upon the prejudices subsisting between Bernard and the supposed heretics of his day,) “that saints shall no longer misunderstand each other.”—*Milner’s History of the Church*, iii. 334.

³ Verse 78.

⁴ Rom. vi. 17.

⁵ Lev. xxii. 22, 23. Comp. Mal. i. 8.

⁶ Verses 12, 33, 64, 68.

⁷ 1 Tim. i. 19.

⁸ Rom. vii. 9.

⁹ Phil. iii. 6.

¹⁰ Isa. v. 24. Hos. vi. 4. Comp. Matt. xiii. 20, 21.

beautiful fruit, may attract the careless eye; but a more narrow inspection will show a worm at the core, which has spoiled nearly to the surface.¹ Such religion is only a shrivelled mass of inactive formality—a dead image of a living thing.

Alas! how common is it to profess to take Christ for a Saviour, while the heart is evidently worshipping Mammon as its God!—constrained—not inclined—to the Lord's statutes! How possible is it to be "carnally-minded" in the daily routine of spiritual exercises! How important is the recollection, that no change of place, of company, or of circumstances, can of itself effect a change of heart! "Saul among the prophets" was Saul still; with "another heart"² indeed, but not a new heart. Sin was restrained, but not crucified. He "went out," therefore, as one of his progenitors, "from the presence of the Lord,"³ and perished, a miserable apostate from the *statutes of his God*. Will profession—knowledge—gifts—feelings—privileges—avail for a *sound heart*? Need we speak of Judas—a follower—nay, even, an apostle of Jesus Christ—living in a familiar intercourse with his Lord—yet with all his privileges—all his profession, "gone to his own place"⁴—the melancholy victim of his own self-deceitfulness? Need we allude to Balaam—"the man whose eyes were open—which heard the words of God—which saw the vision of the Almighty"—who could in the ken of his eye mark the goodliness of the Lord's inheritance, and even in the distant horizon catch a glimpse of "Jacob's star and sceptre," and yet "*loved the wages of unrighteousness*?"⁵ Need we bring to the mind's eye Ananias and Sapphira⁶—Alexander⁷ and Demas⁸—and others of like stamp—all of whom once shone as stars⁹ in the firmament of the Church—need we speak of the end of these men, to give energy to the prayer, "*Let my heart be sound in thy statutes*?"

How fearful the thought of being "a branch in the true vine" only by profession! to be "taken away" at length—"cast forth as a branch—withered—gathered—cast into the fire—burned!"¹⁰ It is in the inner man that hypocrisy sets up its throne; whence it commands the outward acts in whatever shape or form may be best suited to effect its purpose. The upright Christian will therefore begin with calling in the help and light of God to ascertain the "*soundness of his heart*." "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me."¹¹ Can there be a true and solid work, where there is a professed change of heart, and no manifested change of temper and conduct? Can that "*heart*," which is found upon inquiry to be earthly—unprofitable under the power of the

² "Quæ splendent in conspectu hominis, sordent in conspectu judicis." Compare Luke xvi. 15. 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

¹ 2 Sam. x. 9—12.

³ Gen. iv. 6.

⁴ Acts i. 25.

⁵ Num. xxiv. 2—5, 17. 2 Peter ii. 15.

⁶ Acts v. 1—10.

⁷ 1b. xix. 33, 34, with 1 Tim. i. 20. 2 Tim. iv. 14.

⁸ Col. iv. 14. Philem. 24, with 2 Tim. iv. 10.

⁹ Rev. xii. 4.

¹⁰ John xv. 2, 6.

¹¹ Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.

word¹—regarding “secret iniquity”²—seeking by-ends of praise,³ reputation,⁴ or gain⁵—and for the attainment of these ends shrinking from the appointed cross—can that “*heart be sound in the Lord’s statutes?*” Impossible.

But on the other hand, do you find that your trust in God is sincere, your desire towards him supreme, your obedience to him entire? Prize these evidences of “*soundness of heart.*” Thank God for them. They are the workings of his mighty Spirit in your heart—perhaps the answer to the prayer which that same Spirit had indited, “*Let my heart be sound in thy statutes.*” Diligently improve all the means of grace for keeping your heart in a vigorous state. Be daily—yea continually—abiding in the vine, and receiving life and health from its fulness.⁶ Be much conversant with the word of God—loving it for itself—its holiness—its practical influences. Be chiefly afraid of inward decays—of a barren, sapless notion of experimental truth; remembering, that except your profession be constantly watered at the root, “the things that remain in you will be ready to die.”⁷ Specially “commune with your own heart.” Watch it jealously, because of its proneness to live upon itself—its own graces or fancied goodness (a sure symptom of unsoundness)—instead of “living by the faith of the Son of God.” Examine your settled judgment, your deliberate choice, your outgoing affections, your habitual allowed practice; applying to every detection of unsoundness the blood of Christ, as the sovereign remedy for the diseases of a “deceitful and desperately wicked heart.”

But it may be said—will not these exercises of godly jealousy hinder our Christian assurance? Far from it. They will form an efficient preservative from carnal security. They will induce increasing tenderness, activity, and circumspection, in our daily walk; and thus, instead of retarding the enjoyment of our heavenly privilege, they will settle the foundation of a peaceful temperament.⁸ *It is a light and careless frame*, that is the real hindrance to confidence. An unsound professor knows nothing of the true spirit of adoption—nothing of that holy familiarity, with which a child of God unbosoms himself to his heavenly Father; and if he preserves an empty name in the Church, he will be *put to shame* before the universe of God.⁹ But the “*sound heart*” is connected with “a hope that maketh not ashamed”—the full blessing of scriptural confidence. For the heart is made “*sound*” by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ;” and when thus “sprinkled from an evil conscience,” we “have boldness” to “draw near”—yea, even to “enter into the holiest,” “in full assurance of faith.”¹⁰ Blessed privilege of access and communion with our reconciled God! Every moment endears the Saviour to our souls, and enlivens the hope of his glo-

¹ Heb. vii. 8.² Psalm lxxi. 18.³ Kings ix. 16.⁴ John xii. 43.⁵ Ib. vi. 26.⁶ 1 Tim. vi. 5.⁷ Ib. xv. 4, 5.⁸ Rev. iii. 2.⁹ Verse 6. 1 John iii. 20, 21.¹⁰ Compare Dan. xii. 2. Luke xii. 1, 2.¹⁰ See Heb. x. 19—22.

rious coming, as the joyful consummation of all the prospects of faith—"Herein is our love made perfect, *that we may have boldness in the day of judgment.*"¹

PART XI.

81. *My soul fainteth for thy salvation ; but I hope in thy word.*

THE salvation of the Gospel was the constant object of faith and desire to the Lord's people under the old dispensation. Long had the Church triumphed in the glowing anticipation, as if in the full possession of the promised blessing—"It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God ; we have waited for him, and he will save us ; this is the Lord ; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord ; my soul shall be joyful in my God ; for he *hath clothed* me with the garments of salvation ; he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness ; as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."² And as it was the joy of their living moments, so was it the support and consolation of their dying hours. "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord,"³—was the expression of the dying patriarch's faith. And how cheering were the last words of this "sweet Psalmist of Israel," whose "*soul was now fainting for God's salvation,*" even in his dark and foreboding family prospect!—"Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure ; for this is *all my salvation*, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow."⁴ Good old Simeon, in the break of the gospel-day, was ready to "depart in peace, for his eyes had seen God's salvation."⁵ And shall not we, under this heavenly influence, naturally appropriate these feelings of ancient believers to ourselves ? What interpreter but experience will be needed to explain them ? The uneasiness felt in any interruption of our enjoyment, will show the soul to be "*fainting for this salvation.*" Nothing will satisfy but the Saviour. The tempting offer of "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them," will fail in attraction. Still the cry will be, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."⁶ "*Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord ; even thy salvation, according to thy word.*"⁷

As the lowest expectant of this salvation, am not I richer than the sole possessor of this world's portion ? And therefore if the

¹ John iv. 17.

² Isaiah xxv. 9 ; lxi. 10.

³ Gen. xlix. 18.

⁴ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

⁵ Luke ii. 28—30, also 25.

⁶ Psalm xxxv. 3.

⁷ Verse 41.

Lord hides his face, I would look to no other quarter; I would stay by him, and "wait on him," though days and months and years may pass away, "until he have mercy upon me."¹ "*My soul fainteth for his salvation;*" and—pressing to my lips the fullest cup of earth's best joy—my heart would burst with despair of satisfaction, "but" that "*I hope in his word.*"² "By this hope I am saved."³ In "the patience of hope"⁴ I am resolved to wait until the last moment, lying at the footstool of my Saviour. I am looking for the "assurance of this hope"⁵—when, in the joyous anticipation of eternity, and with "the earnest of" the heavenly "inheritance" in my soul, I shall echo the voice of my coming Saviour—"Even so come, Lord Jesus."⁶

Oh, how precious and important a part of our armor is Hope! As a "helmet,"⁷ it has "covered our head in the day of battle" from many a "fiery dart of the wicked." In times of darkness—when the restless foe hides the prospect from the eye of faith, and the child of God can scarcely, if at all, mount up and sing—even then hope remains, and lights a taper in moments dark as the chamber of the grave—"Yet the Lord will command his loving kindness in the day-time; and in the night-season his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life."⁸ And when the afflicted, tempest-tost soul is trembling at the prospect of impending danger—at this moment of infinite peril, Hope holds out the "anchor sure and steadfast;"⁹ so that in the awful crisis, when "deep calleth unto deep, and all the waves and billows are going over us," most unexpectedly "an entrance is ministered unto us *abundantly,*"¹⁰ in the Lord's best time, into our desired haven.¹¹ And it is this hope alone that sustains us. Were we to conceive of God according to the notions of our own hearts, we should give way to most unbelieving impatience. But the Divine character—as it shines forth in the word, with such love and wisdom, such tenderness and grace—invigorates our hope. The strength of the strongest of God's people proves but small, when afflictions press heavy, and expected help is delayed. But though the "*soul fainteth,*" it cannot fail. We depend not on what we see or feel, but on what *the word* promises. If God has engaged, it must be fulfilled, be the difficulties—nay, impossibilities—what they may. Fixed, therefore, upon this sure foundation, with our father Abraham, against hope from what we see, "we believe in hope from what God has promised."¹² Thus *the word* is faith's sure venture for eternity—stamped with such a marvellous, mysterious impression of Divine glory and faithfulness, and communicating such Divine power and refreshment, that the believer cannot but produce his experience of its efficacy for the support of his tempted brethren—"I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait

¹ Psalm cxxiii. 1, 2. Compare Isaiah viii. 17. Micah vii. 9.

² Psalm cxxx. 5.

³ Rom. viii. 24.

⁴ 1 Thess. i. 3.

⁵ Heb. vi. 11.

⁶ Rev. xxii. 20.

⁷ Eph. vi. 17. 1 Thess. v. 8.

⁸ Psalm xlii. 8.

⁹ Heb. vi. 19.

¹⁰ Psalm xlii. 7.

¹¹ 2 Peter i. 11. Psalm cvii. 30.

¹² Rom. iv. 18.

on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."¹

82. *Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?*

THOUGH the believer may be enabled, in the habitual working of faith, to sustain his "hope in the word," yet "hope deferred maketh the heart sick."² Still, Christian, as you value the promise, trust the assurance. Do not be discouraged by present appearances. The sunshine is behind the storm. "The vision is for an appointed time; though it tarry, wait for it."³ "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise," but we are hasty in looking for it.⁴ *The failing of our eyes* is the impatience of the will, "limiting God"⁵ to our own time, ways, and means. Faith may be exercised in not seeing his reasons—not being able to harmonize his promises with his providences, or his outward dispensations with his Divine perfections.⁶ But let us leave this to him, and "be still, and know that he is God."⁷ We shall find in the end, that perseverance in waiting has turned to double advantage; and that even when the present answer to prayer, and also sensible comfort and acceptance have been withheld; yet that important blessings have been accomplished, and the merciful purposes vouchsafed in bringing the wayward will into more entire subjection to himself. Yea, the blessing will be so much the sweeter, from being vouchsafed in the Lord's best time. Waiting time—whatever weariness may attend it—is precious time, and not a moment of it will be lost. The Lord secretly upholds faith and patience, so that every step of feeble perseverance in the way brings with it unspeakable delight. Even while *our eyes fail* for the fulfilment of *the word*, peace is found in submission and joyful expectation; and instead of a time of hardness, indolence, or carelessness, the Lord's return is anticipated the more intensely, as his absence had been felt to be the most painful trial. For as well might the stars supply the place of the sun, as outward comforts, or even the external duties of religion, supply to the waiting soul the place of an absent God.

Never, however, let us forget, that the real cause of separation between God and a sinner is removed. The way of access is opened by the blood of Jesus;⁸ and in this way we must be found waiting, until he look upon us. Here will our cry—"When wilt thou comfort me?" be abundantly answered; and though the sovereignty of God will be exhibited in the time and measure of his consolations, yet the general rule will be—"According to your faith be it unto you."⁹

But if unbelief clouds our comfort, turn the eye more simply to the "word" as testifying of Jesus. Here alone is the ground of comfort; and the more confidently we expect, the more patiently we will look. Nor shall we ever look in vain. Sin will be rebuked.¹⁰

¹ Psalm xxvii. 13, 14.

² Prov. xiii. 12.

³ Hab. ii. 3.

⁴ Comp. 2 Pet. iii. 9, with Isa. v. 19; xxviii. 16.

⁵ Ps. lxxviii. 41.

⁶ Jer. xii. 1.

⁷ Psalm xlvi. 10.

⁸ Hebrews x. 19, 20.

⁹ Matthew ix. 29.

¹⁰ Psalm lxxxix. 30—32.

But restoration and acceptance are assured. We shall obtain—not the spurious comfort of delusion—but those wholesome comforts, founded upon the word of promise, and connected with contrition, peace, love, joy, and triumph. The Gospel shows hell deserved, and heaven purchased—thus combining conviction and faith. Indeed, conviction without faith would be legal sorrow; as assurance without conviction would be Gospel presumption. Paul's experience happily united both. Never was man at the same moment more exercised with conflict, and yet more established in assurance.¹ Thus may we maintain our assurance *as really* in wrestling trouble as in exulting joy; honoring the Lord by a humble, patient spirit—in Bernard's resolution—'I will never come away from thee without thee'—in the true spirit of the wrestling patriarch—"I will not let thee go except thou bless me."²

But we sometimes seem to go "mourning without the sun"³—"shut up, and we cannot come forth"⁴—straitened in our desires and expectations—doing little for the Lord—with little enjoyment in our own souls, and little apparent usefulness to the Church. At such seasons it is our clear duty and privilege to "wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and to *look for him*."⁵ "He waiteth that he may be gracious. He is a God of judgment: and blessed are all they that wait for him."⁶ He waits—not because he is reluctant to give, but that we may be fitted to receive.

83. *For I am become like a bottle in the smoke, yet do I not forge! thy statutes.*

WHAT an affecting picture of misery! Not only were his patience and hope—but his very body—"dried up" by long-continued affliction.⁷ This is he, who in the prime of youth was "ruddy and of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to"⁸—now shrivelled up like a *bottle of skin*⁹ hung up *in the smoke!* "Such is the mark that the rod of "chastening" leaves on the body of humiliation."¹⁰ The soul is strengthened—the body withers—under the stroke.

What might naturally have been expected to have been the result of this lengthened exercise? Saul, under protracted trial, resorted to the devil for relief.¹¹ An infidel nation took occasion from thence to throw off the yoke.¹² Even a good man, under a few hours' trial, murmurs against God—nay, even defends his murmuring. How did this man of God behave?¹³ When his *soul was*

¹ Comp. Rom. vii. 14—25; viii. 33—39.

² Gen. xxxii. 26.

³ Job xxx. 28.

⁴ Psalm lxxxviii. 8.

⁵ Isaiah viii. 17.

⁶ Ib. xxx. 18. "Thou mayest seek after honors, and not obtain them; thou mayest labor for riches, and yet remain poor; thou mayest dote on pleasures, and have many sorrows. But our God, of his supreme goodness, says—Who ever sought me, and found me not? Who ever desired me, and obtained me not? Who ever loved me, and missed of me? I am with him, that seeks for me. He hath me already, that wisheth for me; and he that loveth me is sure of my love. The way to come to me is neither long nor difficult."—*Augustine*.

⁷ Prov. xvii. 22.

⁸ 1 Sam. xvi. 12.

⁹ Josh. ix. 4. Matt. ix. 17.

¹⁰ Ps. xxxix. 11. Comp. xxxi. 12; cii. 3. The history of Job: xxx. 30. The woful misery of the church: Lam. iv. 8; v. 10. The sufferings of the Saviour; Psalm xxii. 15. Isaiah lii. 14.

¹¹ 1 Sam. xxviii. 6, 7.

¹² Mal. iii. 13, 14, with ii. 17.

¹³ Jonah vi. 7—9.

*fainting, his hope in the word kept him from sinking.*¹ Under the further continuance of the trial, the same recollection gives him support—*yet I do not forget thy statutes.*²

Now—Christian—do not expect a new way to heaven to be made for you. Prepare for the cross. It may be—as with David—a heavy, long-continued burden; and, should it come—look on it as your appointed trial of faith, and your training discipline for more enduring conflicts. And remember that your determined resolution rather to pine away in affliction, than “make a way of escape” by sin—is the proof of the reality of his own grace in you, and of his faithful love towards you. Think how honorably he manifests your relation to Christ, by causing “his sufferings to abound in you,” and making you “bear in your body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”³ And do you not thus realize, as you could not otherwise do, the sympathy of our High Priest, who was himself “a root out of a dry ground, having no form nor comeliness, and no beauty that he should be desired—despised and rejected of men”⁴ to the end? Oh, what a supporting cordial to his afflicted people is the sympathy of this suffering, tempted Saviour!⁵

But to look at David, under his long-continued trials, preserving his recollection of *the Lord's statutes*—what a striking evidence of the presence of his God, and the sustaining power of his word! If we then—blessed with much larger Scriptures than he—fail in deriving from them the same support, it can only be, that we do not search them in a dependent, prayerful, and humble spirit—that we do not *simply* look for the revelation of Christ; to mark his glory, and to increase in the knowledge of Him.”⁶ In this spirit we should have more to say of the comfort of remembering “*the Lord's statutes;*” and of their upholding influence, when all other stays were found as “the trust in the shadow of Egypt—shame and confusion.”⁷

Job's history strikingly illustrates both the trial and its sanctified results. When “scraping himself with a potsherd, and sitting down among the ashes,”—the temporary victim of Satanic power—he might well have taken up the complaint, “*I am become like a bottle in the smoke.*” But when in this hour of temptation he was enabled to resist the tempter in the person of his own wife, and commit himself with implicit resignation into the hands of his faithful God, “What! shall we receive good at the hand of God; and shall we not receive evil?”⁸—was not this the confidence,—*yet do I not forget thy statutes?*

This confidence is indeed an encouraging seal of the Lord's love on our souls. For we never should have remembered “*his statutes,*” had he not written his covenant promises upon our hearts.⁹ And how much more honorable to our God is it than the despond-

¹ Verse 81.

² Compare Verses 51, 61, 109, 141; xliv. 17—19.

³ 2 Cor. i. 5. Gal. vi. 17.

¹ 1 Pet. iv. 13.

⁴ Isaiah liii. 2, 3.

⁵ Heb. iv. 15; ii. 18.

⁶ John v. 39.

⁷ Isa. xxx. 1—3.

⁸ Job ii. 7—10.

⁹ Jer. xxxi. 31—34.

ing complaint, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me!"¹ Let us watch then against a proud sullenness under every little trial—such as the coldness of friends, the unkindness of enemies, or our Father's providential dispensations. How sinful to allow hard thoughts of him, whose name and character, "without variableness or shadow of turning," is "Love!" A steady trust in the long and wearisome seasons of tribulation, is indeed to "glorify God in the fires."² Nothing honors him so much as this enduring, overcoming faith, persevering in despite of opposition, in destitution of all outward prospects of relief. It is when "against hope we believe in hope, not staggering at the promise of God through unbelief," that we are "strong in faith, giving glory to God."³

84. *How many are the days of thy servant? When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?*—85. *The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.*

THOUGH a steady confidence in severe and protracted exercise may enable us "*not to forget the statutes;*" yet we shall hasten to carry our complaint before him, "*How many are the days of thy servant?*"—my days of affliction under the "fury of the oppressor." To complain of God is dishonorable unbelief.⁴ To complain to God is the mark of his "elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bears long with them."⁵ Christian! study this instructive pattern; and, when exposed to the lawless devices of "*the proud,*" forget not your hiding-place. God in Christ is your strong hold, "whereunto you may continually resort." He "*hath given commandment to save you.*"⁶ Your trial has done its appointed work, when it has brought you to him; and inclined you, after your blessed Master's example, instead of taking the vengeance into your own hands, to commit yourself and your cause "to him that judgeth righteously."⁷ 'And this,' as Archbishop Leighton excellently observes, 'is the true method of Christian patience—that which quiets the mind, and keeps it from the boiling tumultuous thoughts of revenge; to turn the whole matter into God's hands; to resign it over to him, to prosecute when and as He thinks good. Not as the most, who had rather, if they had power, do for themselves, and be their own avengers; and, because they have not power, do offer up such bitter curses and prayers for revenge unto God, as are most hateful to him, and are far from this calm and holy way of committing matters to his judgment. The common way of referring things to God is indeed impious and dishonorable to him, being really no other than calling him to be a servant and executioner of our passion. We ordinarily mistake his justice, and judge of it according to our own precipitate and dis-tempered minds. If wicked men be not crossed in their designs, and their wickedness evidently crushed, just when we would have

¹ Isaiah xlix. 14.

² Ib. xxiv. 15.

³ Romans iv. 18, 20.

⁴ Jonah iv. 1—3.

⁵ Luke xviii. 7, with Ps. vi. 3; xiii. 1, 2.

⁶ Psalm lxxi. 3.

⁷ 1 Peter ii. 23, and Archbishop Leighton on the passage.

it, we are ready to give up the matter as desperate; or at least to abate of those confident and reverent thoughts of Divine justice which we owe Him. However things go, this ought to be fixed in our hearts, that He that sits in heaven judgeth righteously, and executes that his righteous judgment in the fittest season.⁷

Usually the Psalmist is expressing his love for the law. Here he is complaining against his enemies; yet still implying the same spirit, that *the pits, which the proud dug for him, were not after God's law.* The martyrs' cry under the altar shows the acceptance of this complaint;² "seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble" his people, "and to them that are troubled rest."³ Some of us indeed have known but little of "cruel mockings"⁴ and bitter *persecutions.* Let such be thankful for the merciful exemption from this "hardness:"⁵ but let us gird on their armor for the conflict. Let none of us, in the determination to "live godly in Christ Jesus," expect to escape "persecution."⁶ Let us "count the cost"⁷ of suffering for Christ, whether we shall be able to abide it. For the mere spiritless notions, or for the unenlivened forms of religion, of which we have never felt the power, nor tasted the sweetness, it would be little worth our while to expose ourselves to inconvenience. But if we understand the grand substantial of the Gospel—if we are clearly assured of their reality, practically acknowledge their influence, and experimentally realize their enjoyment, we shall dare the persecuting malice of "*the proud*" in defence of a treasure dearer to us than life itself. Should we, however, be too rich to part with all for Christ, or too high in the estimation of the world to confess his despised followers, it will be no marvel, or rather a marvel of mercy, if he should sweep away our riches, and suffer "*the proud to dig pits for us.*" To make this world "a wilderness or a land of darkness" to us, may be his wisely-ordained means to turn us back to himself as our portion, to his word as our support, to his people as our choice companions, and to heaven as our eternal rest.

86. *All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully: help thou me.*

IN the lengthened duration of trials, the "*eyes fail with looking upward,*" the voice of prayer grows faint, and in a moment of weakness, the faithfulness of God is almost questioned, as if we should go mourning to the very end of our days. It is at such a season that he, who delights to "comfort them that are cast down,"⁸ realizes to the view of faith the unchangeable *faithfulness of his commandments* with respect to his people. In this recollection we can "look up and lift up our heads," and "go on our way," if not "rejoicing," yet at least with humble acquiescence; assured, that in the perseverance of faith and hope, we shall ultimately be "more than conquerors through him that loved us."⁹

¹ Psalm xxxv. 7. ² See Rev. vi. 9—11. ³ 2 Thess. i. 6, 7. ⁴ Hebrews xi. 36.
⁵ 2 Tim. ii. 3. ⁶ Ib. iii. 12. ⁷ Luke xiv. 28. ⁸ 2 Cor. vii. 6. ⁹ Rom. viii. 37.

Many Old Testament Histories beautifully illustrate the reward of this simplicity of faith in temporal emergencies.¹ When Asa's "hands were *made strong* by the *hands of the mighty God of Jacob*," "*his bow abode in strength*."² When, at a subsequent period, he "*trusted in man, and made flesh his arm, and his heart departed from the Lord*,"³ he *became, like Samson, "weak, and as another man."*⁴ So true is it, that no past communications of Divine strength can stand in the stead of the daily habit of dependence upon the Lord, without which we are utterly helpless, and are overthrown in every conflict. Our best prosperity therefore is to leave our cause in his hands, looking upward in the simplicity of wretchedness for his help, '*All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully: help thou me.* Wretched and forlorn I am; but thy truth is my shield.'

Believer! this is your only posture of resistance. Should you enter the field of conflict without this "shield of faith," some crevice will be found in your panoply, through which a "fiery dart" will inflict a poisonous wound.⁵ But how can faith be exercised without a distinct acquaintance with the object of faith? We cannot repose trust or expect help, in an unknown God—in an offended God, whom every day's transgression has made our enemy. There must, then, be reconciliation, before there can be help. Those, therefore, who are unreconciled by the death of Christ, cry for help to a God, who does not hear, accept, or answer, them. But when Christ is known as "the peace," and the way of access to God, what instance can there be of trial or difficulty, when our reliance upon the Lord will fail? Not indeed that we shall always return from the throne of grace with the wished-for relief. For too often we bring our burden before the Lord, and yet through distrust neglect to *leave* it with him. Oh! let us remember when we go to Jesus, that we go to a tried, long-proved, and faithful friend. Dependence upon him is victory. The "good fight" is the fight "of faith."⁶ We are best able to resist our enemy upon our knees; and even such a short prayer as this, "*Help thou me*," will bring down the strength of Omnipotence on our side. But we might as well expect to crush a giant with a straw, as to enter the spiritual conflict with weapons of carnal warfare. Every trial realizes experimentally the help of a faithful Saviour. He does indeed deliver gloriously; and leaves us nothing to do but stand still, wonder, and praise.—"Fear ye not; stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you to-day; for the Egyptians, whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever."⁷

87. *They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I for ook not thy precepts.*

AND why did they not quite consume him? Because "the eyes

¹ The examples of Asa, 2 Chron. xiv. 10—12, and Jehosaphat, 2 Chron. xx. 1—30, may be referred to.

² Gen. xlix. 24.

⁴ Judges xvi. 7, with 2 Chron. xvi. 7.

⁶ 1 Tim. vi. 12.

³ Comp. Jer. xvii. 5—8.

⁵ Eph. vi. 16.

⁷ Exodus xiv. 13.

of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them, whose heart is perfect toward him."¹ "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."² And why have not our spiritual enemies "*consumed us upon earth?*" "Satan hath desired to have us, that he may sift us as wheat." "*But,*" saith the Saviour, "*I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not.*"³ "My sheep shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."⁴ Steadfastness of profession is the evidence of the life of faith: grounded upon this security, the more we are shaken, the more we shall hold fast. Neither long-continued distress,⁵ nor determined opposition,⁶ will turn us from the ways of God. We would rather "*forsake*" all that our heart held dear upon earth, than "*the precepts*" of our God. With whatever intensity of affection we love father and mother, (and the influence of the Gospel has increased the sensibilities of relative affections,) we remember who hath said, "He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me."⁷ Unlike the deluded professor,⁸ we have counted the cost of the tribulation and persecution of the Gospel; and the result has only served to confirm our love and adherence to our heavenly Master. Shall not we find in heaven—nay, do not we find in the Gospel—a far better portion than we lose?⁹

When, therefore, we are tempted to neglect *the precepts*; or when we fail to live in them and to delight in them, let us each bring our hearts to this test. 'What would I take in exchange for them? Will the good will and approbation of the world compensate for the loss of the favor of God? Could I be content to forego my greatest comforts, to "suffer the loss of all things,"¹⁰ yea, of life itself,¹¹ rather than forsake one of the ways of God? When I meet with such precepts as link me to the daily cross, can I throw myself with simple dependence upon that Saviour, who has engaged to supply strength for what he has commanded? How often in times of spiritual temptation, if not of temporal danger, "*they had almost consumed us upon earth!*" but "*in the mount*" of difficulty "*the Lord has been seen.*"¹² Oh! let each of us mark our road to Zion with multiplied Ebenezers, inscribed *Jehovah-jireh—Jehovah-nissi*¹³—"By this I know that thou favorest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face forever."¹⁴

What a fine testimony of the upholding grace of God! How could a helpless believer stand against such an appalling array? Yet it is a great, but a true word, suitable for a babe in Christ as well as for an Apostle—"I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me."¹⁵ Yes, I can "wrestle even against principalities

¹ 2 Chron. xvi. 9.² Ps. lxxvi. 10.³ Luke xxii. 31, 32.⁴ John x. 28.⁵ Verse 83.⁶ Verses 84—86.⁷ Matt. x. 37.⁸ Ib. xiii. 21.⁹ Ib. xix. 29.¹⁰ Phil. iii. 8.¹¹ Acts xx. 24.¹² "In the Mount the Lord shall be seen, or shall appear, *Jehovah-jireh.*" (Gen. xxii.14.)—*Scott, in loco.*¹³ Exod. xvii. 15.¹⁴ Psalm xli. 11, 12.¹⁵ Phil. iv. 13.

ties and powers" of darkness, if I be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."¹

88. *Quicken me after thy loving-kindness: so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.*

WE need continual *quickenings* to maintain our steadfastness in the precepts. "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love, wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ."² But without daily "*quickenings after*" the same "*loving kindness*," "the things which remain will be ready to die." For every breath of prayer, Divine influence must flow—"Quicken us, and we shall call upon thy name."³ For the work of praise, without the same influence we are dumb—"O let my soul live, and it shall praise thee."⁴ For the exercise of every spiritual grace there must be the commanding voice of our Divine Head—"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south: blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."⁵ Thus is the creature laid in the dust, and all the glory is given to God. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."⁶

Why is it, then, that at one time we spring to duty as the joy of our life; while at other times the soul is so chained down under the power of corruption, that it scarcely can put forth the feeblest exercise of life? The source of our life is the same—"hid with Christ in God."⁷ But the power of the flesh hinders its every motion.⁸ Such a spiritual sloth has benumbed us—such backwardness to prayer, and disrelish for heavenly things—sins deeply humbling in themselves, and aggravated by the neglect of the plentiful provision laid up in Christ, not only for the life, but for the peace, joy, and strength of the soul. Nothing but indolence or unbelief straitens our supplies. Oh! stir up the prayer for *quickenings* influence, and we shall be rich and fruitful. Sometimes also self-confidence paralyzes our spiritual energy. We expect our recovery from a lifeless state by more determined resolutions, or increased improvement of the various means of grace. Let these means indeed be used with all diligence, but with the fullest conviction, that all means, all instruments, all helps of every kind, without the influence of the Spirit of grace, are dead. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."⁹

These records of David's prayers strikingly mark the intensity of his desire to live to God. Every decay of strength and activity was, as it were, death to him, and awakened his reiterated cries. Do we desire to *keep the testimony of his mouth*? Do we mourn over our short-comings in service? Oh! then, for our own sake, for the Lord's sake, and for the Church's and the world's sake, let our petitions be incessant, each one for himself—"quicken me"—

¹ Eph. vi. 10, 12.

² Eph. ii. 4, 5.

³ Psalm lxxx. 18.

⁴ Verse 175.

⁵ Cant. iv. 16.

⁶ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

⁷ Col. iii. 3.

⁸ See Gal. v. 17.

⁹ John vi. 63.

Quicken this slothful heart of mine. Enkindle afresh the sacred spark within, and let me be all alive for thee.' Let faith be kept alive and active at the throne of grace, and all will be alive; our obligation will be deeply felt, and practically acknowledged.

The title here given to the directory of our duty—"the testimony of God's mouth"—adds strength to our obligations. Thus let every word we read or hear be regarded, as coming directly from the "mouth of God."¹ What reverence, what implicit submission does it demand! May it ever find us in the posture of attention, humility, and faith, each one of us ready to say—"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth!"²

PART XII.

89. *For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.* 90. *Thy faithfulness is unto all generations; thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.* 91. *They continue this day according to thine ordinances, for all are thy servants.*

THE Christian extends his survey far beyond the limits of his individual sphere. His view of the operations of God in creation enlarges his apprehensions of the Divine attributes, and especially that of unchanging *faithfulness*. Indeed, the very fact of a creation in ruins—a world in rebellion against its Maker, failing of the grand end of existence, and yet still continued in existence—manifests "*his faithfulness unto all generations.*"³ How different is the contemplation of the Christian from the philosopher! His is not a mere cold, speculative admiration, but the establishment of his faith upon a clear discovery of *the faithfulness of God*. Thus he stays his soul upon the assured unchangeableness of the Divine word—"Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever. Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever."⁴ How striking is the contrast between the transient glory of man's goodliness, and the solid foundation of all the promises, hopes, and prospects of the children of God!—"The grass withereth, and the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever."⁵ "Unbelief" is the character of our "evil hearts."⁶ Man chooses his own measure and objects of faith; he believes no more than he pleases. But it is a fearful prospect, that the threatenings of God rest upon the same solid foundation with his promises. "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away."⁷

¹ Compare Judges iii. 20.

⁴ Verses 152, 160.

⁶ Hebrews iii. 12.

² 1 Sam. iii. 9, 10.

³ Gen. viii. 22.

⁵ Isaiah xl. 6—8. Compare 1 Peter i. 24, 25.

⁷ Compare Luke xxi. 28—33.

Need we any further proof of his *faithfulness*? Look at the earth established by his word of power.¹ See how “he hangeth it upon nothing,”² as if it might fall at any moment; and yet it is immovably fixed³—*it abideth*⁴—and with all its furniture *continueth according to his ordinances*. This—though the scoff of the infidel⁵—is the encouragement to Christian faith; it is at once a token of his covenant with nature, that “while the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease;”⁶ and an emblem of his covenant with the seed of David, that he “will not cast them off for all that they have done.”⁷ Thus every view of the heavens—yea—every time we set our foot on the earth⁸—shows the unchangeableness of his everlasting covenant, and the security of the salvation of his own people.

In this vast universe, “*all are his servants*.” “The stars in their courses”—“fire and hail, snow and vapors, stormy winds—fulfil his word. He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly.”⁹ Man—the child of his Maker¹⁰—“created in his image”¹¹—destined for his glory¹²—is the only rebel and revolter. Most affecting is the appeal, that his own Father and God is constrained to make concerning him, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me!”¹³

Is not then the universe of nature a parable of grace—setting out on every side—in every view—a cheering display of the *faithfulness of God*?¹⁴ If his providence fails not, will the promise of his covenant disappoint us? Why should he change? Does he see or know anything now, that he has not foreseen and foreknown from eternity? What more sure ground of salvation than the unchangeableness of God?¹⁵ If I can prove a word to have been spoken by God, I must no more question it than his own being. It may seem to fail on earth; but *it is for ever settled in heaven*. The decrees of the kings of the earth, “settled” on earth, are exposed to all the variations and weakness of a changing world. They may be revoked by themselves or their successors, or they may die away. The empty sound of the “law of the Medes and Persians that altereth not,”¹⁶ has long since been swept away into oblivion. But while “the word settled” on earth has “waxed old like a garment, and perished:” *the word settled in heaven*—is raised above all the revolutions of the universe, and remaineth as the throne of God—unshaken and eternal; exhibiting the foundation of the believer’s hope and of the unbeliever’s terror, to be alike unalterably fixed.

¹ Psalm xxxiii. 9. Heb. i. 3.

³ Psalm xxiv. 2; civ. 5; cxlviii. 6.

⁶ Genesis viii. 22.

⁹ Isaiah liv. 9, 10.

⁹ Judges v. 20. Ps. cxlviii. 8; cxlvii. 15. Compare Job xxxvii. 12. Isaiah xlviii. 13.

¹⁰ Deut. xxxii. 6. ¹¹ Genesis i. 27; v. 1. ¹² Isaiah xliii. 7. ¹³ Isaiah i. 2.

¹⁴ Ps. lxxxix. 2. ¹⁵ Mal. iii. 6. Heb. vi. 17, 18; vii. 21—25. ¹⁶ Daniel vi. 8.

² Job xxvi. 7.

⁴ Eccles. i. 4.

⁵ 2 Peter iii. 4.

⁷ Jer. xxxi. 35, 36; xxxiii. 20, 21, 25, 26.

But we also remark the foreknowledge as well as the *faithfulness* of God. From the eternity that is past, as well as for the eternity that is to come, "*thy word is settled in heaven.*" Before this fair creation was marred, yea, before it was called into existence, its ruin was foreseen, and a remedy provided. "The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world,"¹ and foreordained before² that era. Coeval with this period, a people were "chosen in him,"³ and "*for ever the word was settled heaven.*"—"All that the Father giveth me *shall come to me.*"⁴ For the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom upon earth, "the decree is declared;" however earth and hell may combine against it—"Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion."⁵ And what a blessed encouragement in the grand work of bringing back "the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"⁶ and those "other sheep" with them, which are not of this fold⁷ is it, that we do not depend upon the earnestness of our prayers, the wisdom of our plans, and the diligence of our endeavors; but upon "the word," which "*is for ever settled in heaven!*"—"The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, *saith the Lord.* As for me, this is my covenant with them *saith the Lord—My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words, which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.*" "I have sworn by myself, *the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return,—That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.*"⁸

92. *Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.*

THE support of the word is as sure as its basis—and that in the time when other supports sink—in *affliction*. David—like his great prototype—was a man of affliction⁹—sometimes ready to *perish*—always kept up by *the law* of his God. How many a false professor has been tried and cast by this hour of "*affliction!*" But he who has been sifted by temptation—who has "endured the hardness" of persecution, as a "good soldier of Jesus Christ"¹⁰—and who is ready rather to be "*consumed upon earth,*"¹¹ than to shrink from his profession—this is he whom his Master "will lift up, and not make his foes to rejoice over him."¹² It is the established rule of the kingdom—"Them that honor me I will honor."¹³ "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."¹⁴

The law of God opens to us a clear interest in every perfection of his Godhead—every engagement of his covenant. What won-

¹ Rev. xiii. 8.

² 1 Peter i. 20.

³ Eph. i. 4.

⁴ John vi. 37.

⁵ Psalm ii. 6—8.

⁶ Matt. xv. 24.

⁷ John x. 16.

⁸ Isa. lix. 20, 21; xlv. 23.

⁹ Psalm cxxxii. 1.

¹⁰ 2 Tim. ii. 3.

¹¹ Verse 87.

¹² Psalm xxx. 1.

¹³ 1 Sam. ii. 30.

¹⁴ Rev. iii. 10.

der then, that it brings *delights* which the world can never conceive when bowed down with accumulated *affliction*? However the believer's real character may be hidden from the world, the hour of trial abundantly proves, both what the *law* can do for him, and what a lost creature he would have been without it. In affliction, friends mean well; but of themselves they can do nothing. They can only look on, feel, and pray. They cannot "speak to the heart." This is God's prerogative:¹ and his *law* is his voice.

But for this support, Jonah probably would have "*perished in his affliction.*" In the belly of the fish, as "in the belly of hell," he appears to have recollected the experience of David under deep and awful desertion; and in taking his language out of his mouth, as descriptive of his own dark and terrific condition, a ray of light and hope darted upon his dungeon walls.² Indeed it is a mystery, how a sinner, destitute of the support and comfort of the word of God, can ever uphold himself in his trials. We marvel not, that often, "his soul should choose strangling, and death, rather than his life."³

But in order to derive support from the *law*, it must be "*our delights*"⁴—yea—that it may be *our delights* it must be the matter of our faith. For what solid *delight* can we have in what we do not believe?⁵ Must it not also be our joy in prosperity, if we would realize its support in *affliction*? For this how ineffectual is the mere formal service! Who ever tasted its tried consolations in the bare performance of the outward duty? It must be read as a reality; it will then be taken as a cordial. Let it be simply received, diligently searched, and earnestly prayed over; and it will guide the heavy-laden to Him, who is their present and eternal rest.⁶ The tempest-tossed soul will cast anchor upon it—"Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope."⁷ One promise applied by the Spirit of God is worth ten thousand worlds. And each promise is a staff—if we have but faith to lean upon it—able to bear our whole weight of sin, care, and trial.

Is then *affliction* our appointed lot? If "man is born"—and the child of God twice born—"to trouble, as the sparks fly upward"⁸—

¹ Isaiah xl. 2. Hosea ii. 14. Margin.

² Jonah ii. 3, with Psalm xlii. 7. The phraseology in the LXX. is identical, as if it were a clear and distinct recollection of the Psalmist's expressions, when describing his own state of desertion.

³ Job vii. 15. Compare 2. Cor. vii. 10.

⁴ "Delights"—*instar omnium*—instead of all manner of delights.

⁵ Psalm xxvii. 13.

⁶ Matt. xi. 28. It was the speech of a holy man—after God had made this precious text the messenger to open his dungeon of spiritual distress, and bring him into the light of inward joy—that he had better be without meat, drink, light, air, earth, life, and all, than without this one comfortable Scripture. "If one single promise"—as Gurnal sweetly remarks in giving this story—"like an ear of corn rubbed in the hand of faith, and applied by the Spirit of Christ—can afford such a full satisfying meal of joy to the hunger-bitten, pining soul; oh what price can we set upon the whole field of Scripture, which stands so thick with promises every way as cordial as this!"—Gurnal on Ephesians vi. 17. Well might Luther say—"I have covenanted with my Lord, that he should not send me visions, or dreams, or even angels. I am content with this one gift of the Scriptures, which abundantly teaches and supplies all that is necessary both for this life and that which is to come."

⁷ Verse 49.

⁸ Job v. 7.

how important is it to lay in a store of supply from this inexhaustible treasury against the time when all human support will fail! Supplied hence with heavenly strength, we shall be borne up above the weakness and weariness of the flesh. And as the riches of this store-house are "the riches of Christ,"¹ let those parts be most familiar to us,² which mark his person,³ his character,⁴ offices,⁵ life,⁶ sufferings,⁷ and death,⁸ resurrection and glory,⁹ together with the promises, encouragements, and prospects directly flowing from this blessed subject—and oh! what a treasure-house shall we find richly furnished with every source of delight, and every ground of support!

93. *I will never forget thy precepts; for with them thou hast quickened me.*

AN admirable resolution! the blessed fruit of the quickening power of the word in his deep *affliction*. He had before acknowledged this supernatural efficacy—"Thy word hath quickened me."¹⁰ Now he more distinctly mentions it, as the *instrumental* only—not the *efficient cause*—"With them thou hast quickened me." Had the power been in the word, the same effect would have immediately and invariably followed. Nor should we have been constrained to lament the limited extent of its influence. How many, Christian, shared with you in the outward privileges; but perhaps unto none was the life-giving blessing vouchsafed, save unto yourself—the most unlikely—the most unworthy of all!¹¹ Thus does "God work in us both to will and do"—not according to any prescribed law, but "*of his own good pleasure.*"¹² *The grace therefore is not from, but through, the means.* Almighty God is the source of the life. The word is the instrument—yet so "*quick,*"¹³ so melting,¹⁴ so attractive,¹⁵ that we might ask, out of what rock was that heart hewn, that is proof against its power? Yet while the *precepts* work nothing without the agent,¹⁶ they are the ordinary course, by which the Lord quickeneth whom he will.¹⁷

And do not we find them still lively channels of refreshment? Surely, then, we will hold to our purpose of *not forgetting the precepts*. The leaves of the word of God are the leaves of the tree of life, as well as of the tree of knowledge. They not only enlighten the path, but they supply life for daily walk and progress.

"The words that I speak unto you"—said Jesus—"they are spirit, and they are life,"¹⁸ so that the times when we have been most diligent in our meditation and obedience to the *precepts*, have been uniformly the seasons of our most holy consolation.

Men of the world, however, with accurate recollections of all

¹ Eph. iii. 8. John v. 39.

² Such as Isaiah liii. which, in the compass of a single chapter sketches out his whole history. See below.

³ Isaiah liii. 1, 2.

⁴ Ib. ver. 9.

⁵ Ib. ver. 4, 5, 12.

⁶ Ib. ver. 3.

⁷ Ib. ver. 7, 8.

⁸ Ib. ver. 9.

⁹ Ib. ver. 10—12.

¹⁰ Verse 50.

¹¹ Comp. Luke iv. 25, 26.

¹² Phil. ii. 13.

¹³ Heb. iv. 12.

¹⁴ Jer. xxiii. 29.

¹⁵ Matt. xi. 28.

¹⁶ 1 Cor. iii. 7.

¹⁷ John v. 21. Rom. x. 17.

¹⁸ John vi. 63.

matters connected with their temporal advantage, are remarkably slow in retaining the truths of God. They plead their short memories, although conscious that this infirmity does not extend to their important secular engagements. But what wonder that they *forget the precepts*, when they have never been quickened *with them*—never received any benefit from them? The word of God is not precious to them: they acknowledge no obligation to it: they have no acquaintance with it. It has no place in their affections, and therefore but little abode in their remembrance.

But this resolution is the language of sincerity, not of perfection. The child of God is humbled in the conscious "*forgetfulness of the Lord's precepts.*" And this consciousness keeps his eye fixed upon Jesus for pardon and acceptance: while every fresh sense of acceptance strengthens his more habitual remembrance. Then as for his natural inability to preserve an accurate recollection of Divine things—let him not estimate the benefit of the word by the results in the memory, so much as by the impressions upon the heart. The word may have darted through the mind, as a flash of lightning, that strikes and is gone; and yet the heart may have been melted, and the passing flash may have shed a heavenly ray upon a dubious path. If the heart retains the quickening power—"*The precepts are not forgotten,*" even though the memory should have failed to preserve them.

But whatever word of conviction, direction, or encouragement, may have come to us, affix this seal to it—"*I will never forget thy precepts.*" It may be of signal use in some hour of temptation. The same Spirit that breathed before upon it, may breathe again; if not with the same present sensible power, yet with a seasonable and refreshing recollection of past support.

94. *I am thine; save me; for I have sought thy precepts.*

WHAT a high and honorable character is stamped upon the meanest believer! He is the Saviour's unalienable property,¹ his portion,² the "wormanship"³ of his hand, the purchase of his blood,⁴ the triumph of his conquering love.⁵ He is given to him by his Father⁶—"preserved in him, and called."⁷ The evidence of his character is found in "*seeking the Lord's precepts.*" "Whom we serve" will prove "whose we are."⁸ "His servants ye are, to whom ye obey."⁹ "Know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself."¹⁰ "The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh" cannot *seek the Lord's precepts.*¹¹ A new and spiritual bias, therefore, is the visible stamp and seal of the Lord's interest in us.

True it is, that our Divine Saviour can never be robbed of his property—that his people are saved in him, beyond the reach of earth

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 23.

² Deut. xxxii. 9.

³ Eph. ii. 10.

⁴ Psalm lxxiv. 2. Acts xx. 28. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

⁵ Isaiah liii. 10—12. Luke xi. 21, 22.

⁶ John vi. 37; x. 29; xvii. 6, 11.

⁷ Jude i.

⁸ Acts xxvii. 23.

⁹ Rom. vi. 16.

¹⁰ Psalm iv. 3.

¹¹ Rom. viii. 7, 8.

and hell to touch them. Yet are they dependent still—always sinners—every day's provocation making them more sinners than before; needing, therefore, from day to day, fresh power, fresh keeping, and above all, fresh cleansing and acceptance. But what a powerful plea for mercy may we draw from the Lord's interest in us! Will not a man be careful of his children, his treasure, his jewels? Such am I.¹ Thy sovereign love hath bought me—made me *thine*²—*I am thine; save me.* Thou hast saved me; “thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling?”³ Save me from the love of sin, from the daily guilt and power of sin; from the treachery of my own foolish heart; from all this, and all besides, which thou seest ensnaring to my soul. If I am not thine, whence this desire, this endeavor to “*seek thy precepts?*” What mean my privileged moments of communion with thee? What mean the yet unsatisfied desires after a conformity to thine image? Lord, I would humbly plead thine own act, thy free and sovereign act, that made me thine. Save me, because thou hast brought thy salvation near to me, and sealed me thine. I need mercy to begin with me; mercy to accompany me; mercy to abide with me for ever. “*I am thine, save me.*”

And what irresistible energy does it give to our pleading, that this was the sole purpose, that brought down the Son of God from heaven! “I came down”—said he—“from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. *And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing.*”⁴ Of this purpose he was enabled to testify at the conclusion of his work—“*Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition.*”⁵

But some cry for *salvation*, who neglect duty, and thus make void their plea. Can we make our interest good, by *seeking his precepts?* Is it the way in which we love to walk? Then let us not desist from our plea before God, until our heart listens to the voice of love, centering every blessing of creation, redemption, and heavenly calling, in the privilege of adoption—“Thus saith the Lord, that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed thee: I have called thee by thy name; *thou art mine.* *Thou art my servant;* O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions; and as a cloud, thy sins.”⁶ I have regarded this thy plea. I have heard this thy prayer—“*I am thine, save me.*”⁷

95. *The wicked have waited for me to destroy me; but I will consider thy testimonies.*

AM I, as a believer, safe as the Lord's property, and in the Lord's

¹ Heb. ii. 13. Exodus xix. 5. Mal. iii. 17.

² Isaiah xliii. 3, 4.

³ Psalm lvi. 13.

⁴ John vi. 38, 39.

⁶ Ib. xvii. 12; xviii. 9.

⁵ Isaiah xliii. 1; xlv. 21, 22.

⁷ The same plea is urged in prayer, Psalm cxliii. 12; lxxvi. 2. Margin. Compare also verse 125.

keeping? Yet must I expect that *the wicked*, the ungodly, as the instruments of Satan, will not cease to distress me. The Psalmist had before alluded to this trial, as driving him to his refuge.¹ And, indeed, this is the constant character of the believer's walk—enduring the enmity of the ungodly, and seeking his refuge in the word of God—in that hiding-place of safety to which the word directs him. How striking is the proof of the irreconcilable variance between God and the world—the world encouraging all that is contrary to God, and persecuting his image in his people! Yet the word opens to us a sure defence. If our “soul is among lions,”² cannot we testify to the astonishment of the world—“My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me?”³ We hear indeed the roaring of the winds and waves; but we hear also the voice hushing the storm to rest—“Peace, be still.”⁴

The experience of this trial and support beautifully illustrates the promise—“He that believeth shall not make haste.”⁵ He whose hope is firmly fixed on that “tried corner-stone,” which God himself hath “laid in Zion as a sure foundation”—“shall not be greatly moved;” nay, he “shall not moved”⁶ at all, by “*the wicked waiting for him to destroy him.*” In the hour of difficulty, instead of perplexing himself with successive expedients for his safety (sought more from human contrivance, than from asking counsel at the mouth of God,) he “possesses his soul in patience,” and calmly commits all events to the Lord. Such a man “shall not be afraid of evil tidings! his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.”⁷ “This trust is grounded on the word of God, revealing his power and all-sufficiency, and withal his goodness, his offer of himself to be the stay of the soul, commanding us to rest upon him. People wait on I know not what persuasions and assurances; but I know no other to build faith on, but the word of promise. The truth and faithfulness of God opened up his wisdom and power and goodness, as the stay of all those that, renouncing all other props, will venture on it, and lay all upon him. “He that believes, sets to his seal that God is true:” and so he is sealed for God; his portion and interest secured. “If you will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.”⁸

But it is the “*considering* of the Lord's testimonies,” that draws out their staying support. The soul must be fixed upon them, as “tried words, purified seven times in the fire.”⁹ And in this frame “*I will,*” under all distresses, all circumstances of trial, or even of dismay, “*consider thy testimonies.*” “*I will consider*” the faithfulness of those blessed declarations—“There shall not an hair of your head perish. Touch not mine anointed.”¹⁰ “He that toucheth

¹ Verses 78, 87. Comp. ver. 114, 115.

² Psalm lvii. 4.

³ Daniel vi. 22.

⁴ Mark iv. 39.

⁵ Isaiah xxviii. 16.

⁶ Psalm lxii. 2, 6. His confidence increased in the recollection of his support—“I shall not be greatly moved—I shall not be moved.”

⁷ Psalm cxii. 7.

⁸ Leighton's Works, iii. 256, 257.

⁹ Psalm xii. 7, P. B. Trans.

¹⁰ Luke xxi. 18. Psalm cv. 15.

you, toucheth the apple of mine eye."¹ With this armor of defence, I shall not be afraid, even should I hear the "evil tidings," that "*the wicked have waited for me to destroy me.*" Or even should I be destroyed, I know that *thy testimonies* cannot fail—that my rock is perfect—"that there is no unrighteousness in him;"² and therefore, "though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident."³ Whether, then, I am delivered from *the wicked*, and "live—I live unto the Lord;" or whether I fall into their snare, and "die—I die unto the Lord;"⁴ for "*I will consider thy testimonies,*" assured that all thy purposes shall be accomplished concerning me, as thou hast said—"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."⁵ "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee."⁶

97. *I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.*

A DEEPER insight in the Lord's "*testimonies*" is the sure result of "*considering*" them. Weigh them in the balances against this world's excellency; the world and the word—each with all its fulness. Of the one *perfection we see an end*—of the other—none. This world is a matter of experience and observation. *We have seen it—an end*—not of some—but of *all its perfection*. It wants *sufficiency*. It stands us in no stead in the great emergencies of affliction—death—judgment—eternity. *It wants solidity in its best substance*. "In its wisdom is grief!"⁷ All its delicacies and indulgences—after having, like the King of Jerusalem, "not withheld the heart from any joy"—all ends in the verdict of disappointment—"Behold! all was vanity and vexation of spirit!"⁸ *Its continuance is but for a moment*. The soul is born for eternity. Therefore it must have a portion to last as long as itself. But the world, with its lusts and fashion, passeth away.⁹ All that it can offer is a bubble—a shadow. In its best riches, honors, and pleasures—in the utmost that its *perfection* can yield—in its height and prime of enjoyment—what is it in itself—what is it able to do for us? "All is vanity."¹⁰ And yet such is the alienation of the heart from God, that it is first tried to the very uttermost, before any desire to return homeward is felt or expressed. And even then, nothing but the Almighty power of God can bring the sinner back. He would rather perish in his misery, than "return to his rest."

Now contrast with the emptiness of the world the fulness of "*the commandment of God.*" Our whole duty to our God, our neighbor, and ourselves, is here laid open before us—commanding without abatement, and forbidding without allowance—making no excuse for ignorance—frailty—or forgetfulness—reaching not only to every

¹ Zech. ii. 8.

² Psalm xcii. 15.

³ Ib. xxvii. 3.

⁴ Rom. xiv. 8.

⁵ Heb. xiii. 5.

⁶ Isaiah xxvi. 3.

⁷ Eccl. i. 18.

⁸ Ib. ii. 10, 11.

⁹ Ib. i. 2.

¹⁰ 1 John ii. 17. 1 Cor. vii. 31.

species of crime, but to everything tending to it. This is "*perfection*," of which we never "*see an end*." Every fresh view opens—not the extent—but the immensity of the field; and compels us at length to shut up our inquiries with the adoring acknowledgment—*Thy commandment is exceeding broad*. Its various parts form one seamless piece; so that no particle can be separated without injury to the whole. As all the curtains of the tabernacle, connected by taches and loops, made but one covering for the ark, and the loosening or disjunction of the smallest point disannulled the fitness of the whole; so it belongs to the perfection of *the commandment*, that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."¹ The spirituality of its requirements equally illustrates its Divine "*perfection*." An angry look is murder;² an unchaste desire is adultery;³ the "stumbling-block of iniquity"⁴—"covetousness"⁵ in the heart is idolatry; the thought⁶ as well as the act—the first conception of sin, as well as the after commission—brings in the verdict—Guilty—Death.

Can we then endure the sight of its "*exceeding breadth*?" Yes—for *the commandment* of the Gospel⁷ is equally *broad*, and covers all.⁸ We know who hath stood in our place—who hath satisfied Sinai's unalterable requirements, and borne its awful curse.⁹ *Broad* as it may be, the love which hath fulfilled it is immeasurable. As a covenant, therefore, it has now lost its terrors. As a rule, we love it for its extent, and for its purity; for the comprehensiveness of its obligations, and for the narrowness of its liberty for indulgence; nor would we wish to be subject to a less severe scrutiny, or a more lenient administration.

Reader! If you have learnt "*the exceeding breadth*" and spirituality of the law (the first lesson that is taught and learnt in the school of Christ,) your views of yourself and your state before God will be totally changed. Before, you were "thanking God" in your heart, "that you were not as other men are." Now you will be "smiting upon your breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!"¹⁰ Before, perhaps you might have thought yourself, "touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless." Now you will glory in your new and more enlightened choice—"What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."¹¹ Once you considered yourself "alive," when you were really dead. Now that "the commandment is come" in its heart-searching spirituality and conviction to your soul, you "die"¹² that you may live. Blessed change from the law to the Gospel—"from death to life!" "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God."¹³

Such is the effect of the transition from a legal to an evangelical ground. Before, we were reckless of sin, and therefore reckless of

¹ James ii. 10, 11.

³ Matt. v. 27.

⁶ Prov. xxiv. 9. Compare xxiii. 7.

⁸ Rom. iii. 22.

¹¹ Phil. iii. 6, 7.

² Matt. v. 21, 22. Comp. 1 John iii. 15.

⁴ Ezek. xiv. 7.

⁵ Ephes. v. 5.

⁷ John vi. 23, 29. 1 John iii. 23.

⁹ Gal. iv. 4, 5; iii. 13.

¹⁰ Luke xviii. 9—13.

¹² Romans vii. 9.

¹³ Gal. ii. 19.

the Gospel. As the one fell lightly upon our conscience, the other held a light estimation in our judgment. While we had no disturbance from the law, we had no delight in the Gospel. But now that we see through the true mirror, we are at once alarmed and enlightened. Praised be God!—we now take the true estimate—we degrade to the uttermost righteousness by works—we exalt to the uttermost righteousness by faith. In the one we see pollution—in the other perfection.

PART XIII.¹

97. *Oh! how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*

MARK the man of God giving utterance to his feelings of heavenly delight—expressing most, by intimating, that he cannot adequately express what he desires. He seems unable to restrain his acknowledgments of Divine influence springing up in his heart—“*Oh! how love I thy law!*” This experience is most distinctive of a spiritual character. The professor may read, and understand, and even *externally* obey the law; but the believer only *loves* it; and he lives in it, as if he could not live without it. To the professor it is a task imposed to satisfy conscience. “The veil upon the heart”² darkens all his spiritual apprehension, and consequently excludes spiritual delight. To the child of God it is food and medicine, light and comfort—yea, “life from the dead.” The law of precept in the world is a “law of liberty”³—a law of love—in his heart. His former obedience was the bondage of fear. But how different is the effect of constraining love! He now delights to view it in every lineament. He dwells upon every feature with intense enjoyment. Before, it was his confinement—his chain. Now, it is his liberty—his ornament. He is not what he was, “Old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new.”⁴

Think what good reason there is to *love the law*. It is the epistle of our most beloved friend—not to be slighted, but to be placed in our bosom—nearest our hearts. It sets out that relief, without which the conscience would have been tortured with the never-dying worm.⁵ There is more of glory—more of God—in this, than in any other manifestation of his name.⁶ It has ever been the mirror, that has reflected Christ to his Church. The spiritual eye discerns him in every part.⁷ Now—reader—do you search for him in

¹ “I enjoyed a solemn seriousness in learning Mem in the 119th Psalm.”—Martyn’s Journals, vol. i. p. 191.

² 2 Cor. iii. 15.

³ James i. 25.

⁴ 2 Cor. v. 17.

⁵ 2 Cor. v. 19.

⁶ Psalm cxxxviii. 2. Eph. iii. 10. 2 Tim. i. 10.

⁷ John v. 39. “Were I to enjoy Hezekiah’s grant, and to have fifteen years added

his law? Do you "*love his law,*" because it "*testifies of him?*" Do you pray for his Spirit, that his law may guide you to him? This is the evidence, that you have "*turned unto the Lord, when the veil is taken away,*" and you "*with unveiled face behold in this glass the glory of the Lord.*"¹ Then if you do *love his law,* you will love the whole of it—its obligations as well as its privileges. You will love it *at all times,*² even when it is thwarting your own will and way. The whole law is light and love—wisdom and faithfulness.

But *love of the law* fastens the soul to the beloved object, "*It is my meditation all the day.*"³ When you cannot have it in your hand, it will be found, if indeed your soul is in a prosperous state, "*hid in your heart.*" There it is kept as your most precious treasure; while you live upon it with unwearied appetite as your daily bread, and exercise yourself in it as your daily rule. Oh, how worthy is it of all the love of the warmest heart! The deepest students are most humbled for their want of suitable enlargement.

But this heavenly spirit can only be grounded upon a sense of reconciliation. Can an unreconciled sinner be interested in *the law,* in every page of which he reads his own condemnation? This explains the enmity of the ungodly.⁴ But the cultivation of this spirit *upon the ground of the Gospel* is a most important principle of Christian steadfastness, the want of which has been the source of fearful delusion;⁵ and in the exercise of which we shall realize a deeper insight, and more spiritual discernment of Scriptural Truth. Warm affections will be far more influential than talent, or mere external knowledge.

This habit of love and holy meditation will spread its influence over our whole character. It will fill our hearts with heavenly matter for prayer, diffuse a sweet savor over our earthly employments, sanctify the common bounties of Providence,⁶ realize the presence of God throughout the day, command prosperity upon our lawful undertakings,⁷ and enlarge our usefulness in the Church.⁸ Thus the man of God is formed in his completeness, symmetry, and attraction—such as the world is often constrained secretly to admire, even where the heart is unready to follow.

Lord! implant in my heart a supreme "*love to thy law.*" Write it upon my heart—even that new law, "*the law of the Spirit of*

to my life, I would be much more frequent in my applications to the throne of grace. Were I to renew my studies, I would take my leave of those accomplished triflers—the historians, the orators, the poets of antiquity—and devote my attention to the Scriptures of truth. I would sit with much greater assiduity at my Divine Master's feet, and desire to know nothing but 'Jesus Christ and him crucified.' This wisdom, whose fruits are peace in life, consolation in death, and everlasting salvation after death—this I would trace—this I would seek—this I would explore through the spacious and delightful fields of the Old and New Testament." Such was the testimony of one, who had cultivated the classic fields with no inconsiderable success, and who above most men had enriched his soul with the glorious treasures of the word of God—whose praise is in all the churches as the Author of "*Theron and Aspasio.*"

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 15—18.

² Verse 20.

³ Psalm i. 2.

⁴ Compare 1 Kings xxii. 8.

⁵ See 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11.

⁶ 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.

⁷ Ps. i. 3. Comp. Jos. i. 7, 8.

⁸ 1 Tim. iv. 15.

life in Christ Jesus."¹ May I love it so that I may be always meditating upon it, and by continual meditation yet more enlarging my love and delight in it! So let it prove an ever-springing source of heavenly enjoyment and holy conversation!

98. *Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me.* 99. *I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.* 100. *I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.*

WHAT a fruitful harvest did David reap from his glowing love, and "*daily meditation on the law of God!*" He became "*wiser than his enemies*" in "*subtlety,*"²—"*than all his teachers*" in doctrine, "*than the ancients*" in experience. Yet he is not speaking of his extraordinary gift as a prophet, but of his knowledge gained by ordinary means. Nor is he here boasting of his own attainments; but commending the grace of God in and towards him—"*Thou, through thy commandments hast made me wiser.*"³ How much more wisdom does the persecuted believer draw from the word of God, than his persecutors have ever acquired from the learning of this world! Those, however, who have been *effectually* taught of God, need to be *daily* taught of him. While they rest upon their God, and seek counsel at his word, they are wise indeed; yet when they trust to their own wisdom, and turn to their own counsel, they become a by-word and occasion of offence by their own folly. Was David "*wiser than his enemies or his teachers,*" when he dissembled himself to fight against his own people⁴—or when he yielded to the indulgence of lust⁵—or when in the pride of his heart he numbered the people?⁶ Alas! how often do even God's children befool themselves in the ways of sin!

But how did David attain this Divine wisdom? Not by habits of extensive reading—not by natural intelligence—but by a diligent *meditation in the testimonies.*⁷ In order to avail ourselves however of this means—a *simple reception of the Divine testimony is of absolute importance.* We can never obtain that assurance of the certainty of our faith, which is indispensable to our peace, or resist the influence of unenlightened "*teachers*"—or the long-established worldly maxims of "*the ancients,*" *except by entire submission to the supreme authority of Scripture.* Many sincere Christians—especially at the outset of their course—are much hindered—either by the scepticism of others, or of their own minds; or from their previous habit of studying the Bible in the light of carnal wisdom, or in dependence upon human teaching. Such need special prayer for humility of mind and simplicity of faith. Under this gracious influence they will discern that path to glory, which in infinite condescension is made so plain, that "*the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein,*" and the unlearned believer, who

¹ Rom. viii. 2.

² Prov. i. 1, 4.

³ Ib. ii. 6. James i. 17.

⁴ 1 Sam. xxvii.

⁵ 2 Sam. xi.

⁶ Ib. xxiv.

⁷ This was bound upon him as a king. Deut. xvii. 18, 19.

has the word before his eyes, in his heart, and in his life, shall become "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."¹

In our Christian progress, David's habit of scriptural *meditation* will prove of essential service. For while those who "confer with flesh and blood" cannot have their counsellors always at hand; we, seeking our wisdom from the word of God, have the best Counsellor "*ever with us,*" teaching us what to do, and what to expect. Obedience also, as well as meditation, directs our way. David found *understanding, because he kept the precepts.* And David's Lord has pointed out the same path of light: "*If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine.*"² "*Thou meetest him that rejoiceth, and worketh righteousness—those that remember thee in thy ways.*"³ Thy ways truly are ways of light, joy and love!

Now let us turn in, and inquire—What is our daily use of the word of God? Are we satisfied with a slight looking, or seeking an intimate acquaintance with it? Is its influence ever present—ever practical? Do we prize it as a welcome guest? Is it our delightful companion and guide? Oh! *meditate in* this blessed book. "Eat the word," when you have "found it; and it will be unto you the joy and rejoicing of your heart."⁴ The name of Jesus—its great subject—will be more precious—your love will be inflamed⁵—your perseverance established⁶—and your heart enlivened in the spirit of praise.⁷ Thus bringing your mind into close and continual contact with "*the testimonies of God,*" and pressing out the sweetness from the precious volume, it will drop, as from the honeycomb, daily comfort and refreshment upon your heart.⁸

101. *I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.*

DAVID'S wisdom was of a practical—not of a mere intellectual or speculative character. It taught him to "*keep the Lord's precepts,*" and in order to do this, to "*refrain his feet from every evil way.*" And will not advancing wisdom show itself by increasing tenderness of conscience and carefulness of conduct? The professor is afraid of hell—the child of God, of sin. The one *refrains* from the outward act—the other seeks to be crucified to the love of sin. Observe not only the practice but the motive—that *he might keep the word.* Shall we not "abhor that which is evil," that we might "cleave to that which is good"⁹—abstaining from "all appearance of

¹ Isaiah xxxv. 8. ² Tim. iii. 17.

³ Isaiah lxiv. 5. Comp. John xiv. 21—23.

⁵ Psalm xxxix. 3.

⁶ Verses 23, 95.

² John vii. 17.

⁴ Jer. xv. 16.

⁷ Psalm lxiii. 5, 6.

⁸ Thus Luther recommends us to "pause at any verse of Scripture we choose, and to shake, as it were, every bough of it; that, if possible, some fruit at least may drop down to us. Should this mode"—he remarks—"appear somewhat difficult at first, and no thought suggest itself immediately to the mind capable of affording matter for a short ejaculation; yet persevere, and try another and another bough. If your soul really hungers, the Spirit of God will not send you away empty. You shall at length find in one, and that perhaps a short verse in Scripture, such an abundance of delicious fruit, that you will gladly seat yourself under its shade, and abide there, as under a tree laden with fruit."

⁹ Rom. xii. 9.

evil,"¹ lest unconsciously we should be drawn into the atmosphere of sin—"hating even the garment spotted by the flesh"²—fearing the infection of sin worse than death? But how fearful the danger of self-deception! What need to entreat the Lord to "see if there be any wicked way in us!"³ Oh! for the large supply of grace and unction, to maintain an upright walk before a heart-searching God; to "keep ourselves from our iniquity;"⁴ and in dependence upon the promises, and in the strength of the Gospel, to "perfect holiness in the fear of God!"⁵

But how awful to hear men talk of *keeping the word* in a loose and careless profession! For how can it be kept, if the heart has not felt its holiness? For this is its beautiful peculiarity; that, in order to *keep* it, there must be a separation from sin. The two things are incompatible with each other. The two services are at variance at every point; so that the love of sin must be cast out where the love of God is ingrafted in the heart. Yet so strongly are we disposed to *every evil way*, that only the Almighty power of grace can enable us to "*refrain from*" one or another crooked path. Often is the pilgrim (yea, has it not too often happened to ourselves?) held back by a temporary ascendancy of the flesh—by a little license given to sin—or by a relaxed circumspection of walk. At such seasons the blessed privilege of "*keeping the word*" is lost. We are sensible of a declining delight in those spiritual duties, which before were "our chiefest joy." And "is there not a cause?" Have we not provoked our gracious God by harboring his enemy in our bosom—nay, more—by pleading for its indulgence? Has not "the Holy Spirit been grieved" by neglect, or by some worldly compliance: so that his light has been obscured, and his comforting influence quenched? No consolations, consistent with the love and power of sin, can ever come from the Lord. For the holiness of the word of God cannot be either spiritually understood, or experimentally enjoyed, but in a consistent Christian walk. And yet such is the true blessedness of the word, that the very expectation of *keeping it* may operate as a principle of restraint "*from every evil way.*"

Is there any bondage in this restraint from sin? Oh, no! Sin is slavery; and therefore deliverance from it is "perfect freedom." There is indeed a *legal restraint* much to be deprecated, when the conscience is goaded by sins of omission or of wilfulness; and the man, ignorant of, or imperfectly acquainted with, the only way of deliverance, hopes to get rid of his burden by a more circumspect walk. But not till he casts it at the foot of the cross, and learns to look wholly to Jesus his deliverer, can he form his resolution upon safe and effectual grounds. Oh, may I therefore seek to abide within a constant view of Calvary! Sin will live everywhere, but under the cross of Jesus. Here it withers and dies. Here rises the spring of that holiness, contrition and love, which

¹ 1 Thess. v. 22.

⁴ Ib. xviii. 23.

² Jude 23.

⁵ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

³ Psalm cxxxix. 24.

refreshes and quickens the soul. Here then let me live; here let me die.¹

Blessed Lord! Thou knowest that I desire to "*keep thy word.*" Prepare my heart to receive and to retain it. May I so "*abide in Christ,*" that I may receive the sanctifying help of his Spirit for every moment's need! And while I rejoice in him as my Saviour, may I become daily more sensible of every deviation from the straight path! May my eye guide my feet! "*Looking to Jesus,*" may I have light and grace! And may daily grace be given to "*refrain my feet from every evil way, that I may keep thy word!*"

102. *I have not departed from thy judgments; for thou hast taught me.*

IF "*I have refrained my feet from*" sin—if "*I have not departed from God's judgments*"—to him be all the glory. O my soul! art thou not a wonder to thyself? So prone to depart—to be carried away by uncertain notions—by the opposition of Satan—by the example or influence of the world—how is it, that thou art able to hold on thy way? Because the covenant of the Lord engages thy perseverance,—"*I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.*"² While conscious of my own corrupt bias to depart, let me humbly and thankfully own the work of Divine teaching. Man's teaching is powerless in advancing the soul one step in Christian progress. The teaching from above is "*the light of life.*"³ It gives not only the light, but the principle to improve it. It not only points the lesson, and makes it plain; but imparts the disposition to learn, and the grace to obey. So that now I see the beauty, the pleasantness, the peace, and the holiness of "*the Lord's judgments,*" and am naturally constrained to walk in them. Oh how much more frequent would be our acknowledgment of the work of God, did we keep nearer to the Fountain-head of life and light!⁴ How may we trace every declension in doctrine and practice—all our continual estrangement *from the Lord's judgments*—to following our own wisdom, or depending upon human teaching! "*Trusting in man*" is the departing of the heart from the Lord.⁵ I never shall depart from sin by the influence of human persuasion. I never shall depart from the Lord, so long as I have the witness in my heart—*Thou teachest me.*

Reader! what has been your habit and progress "*in the judgments of God?*" Have you been careful to avoid by-paths? Has your walk been consistent, steady, advancing—"in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost?"⁶ If there has

¹ "When I am assaulted by some wicked thought, I then betake me to the wounds of Christ. When my flesh casteth me down, by the remembrance of my Saviour's wounds, I rise up again. Am I inflamed with lust? I quench that fire with the meditation of Christ's passion. Christ died for us. There is nothing so deadly, that is not cured by the death of Christ."—*Augustine.*

² Jer. xxxii. 40. Compare xxxi. 33. 1 John ii. 27.

³ John viii. 12. Comp. Eph. v. 14.

⁵ Jer. xvii. 5.

⁴ Psalm xxxvi. 9.

⁶ Acts ix. 31.

been no allowed departure from the ways of God, it has been the blessed fruit of "ceasing from your own wisdom,"¹ and simple dependence upon the promise "written in the prophets—And they shall be all taught of God." And how delightfully does this heavenly teaching draw your heart with a deeper sense of need and comfort to the Saviour! For, as he himself speaks, "*every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*"² Remember—it was no superior virtue or discernment, that has restrained your departure from God, but—"Thou hast taught me" the way to come to God; the way to abide in him—Christ the way—Christ the end. And his teaching will abide with you.³ It will win you by light and by love, and by a conquering power allure your heart with that delight in his judgments, and fear of offending against them, that shall prove an effectual safeguard in the hour of temptation. Watch the first step of departure—the neglect of secret prayer—the want of appetite for the sincere word—the laxing of diligence—the loss of the savor of godliness. Be careful therefore that the teaching of the Lord be not lost upon you. Inquire into your proficiency in his instructive lessons. And do not forget to prize his teaching rod—that loving correction, of which David had felt the blessing,⁴ and which he so often uses, to keep his children from "*departing from his judgments.*"

Lord! do thou lead me by the hand, that I may make daily progress in "*thy judgments.*" Restrain my feet from "perpetual backsliding." All human instruction will be ineffectual to keep me from "*departing from thy judgments,*" except "*thou teachest me.*" Neither grace received, nor experience attained, nor engagements regarded, will secure me for one moment without continual teaching from thyself.

103. *How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth.*

NONE but a child of God could take up this expression; because none besides has a spiritual taste. The exercises of David in this sacred word were delightfully varied. Its majesty commanded his reverence.⁵ Its riches calleth forth his love.⁶ Its sweetness excited his joy. Its holy light, keeping his heart close with God,⁷ naturally endeared it to his soul.⁸ How barren is a mere external knowledge of the Gospel! The natural man may talk or even dispute about its precious truths. But he has never tasted them—at least not so as to relish and feed on them. The highest commendation cannot explain the *sweetness of honey*⁹ to one who has never tasted it. Thus nothing but experience can give a spiritual intelligence. But what we have really tasted, we can warmly commend—"Oh!

¹ Prov. xxiii. 4.

² Isaiah liv. 13, with John vi. 45.

³ 1 John ii. 24, 27.

⁴ Verse 67.

⁵ Verses 129, 161.

⁶ Verses 72, 127. Ps. xix. 10.

⁷ Verse 102.

⁸ Verse 140. Thrice in one short Psalm does he stir up his habit of praise of the word, and of the God that gave it. See Psalm lvi. 4, 10.

⁹ Prov. xxiv. 13, 14.

taste and see that the Lord is good."¹ Having once tasted of his Divine goodness, the sweetest joys of earth will be insipid, distasteful, and even bitter.

Do we ask—what is it that gives this unutterable sweetness to the word?² Is it not that name, which "is as ointment poured forth?"³ Is it not "the savor of the knowledge in Christ,"⁴ that revives the soul in every page with the breath of heaven? For can the awakened sinner hear, that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"⁵—and not be ready to say, "*How sweet are thy words unto my taste, yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth?*" Can the weary soul listen to the invitation to "all that labor and are heavy laden,"⁶ and not feel the "*sweetness*" of those breathings of love? Who can tell the *sweetness* of those precious *words* to the conflicting, tempted soul—displaying the Divine sovereignty in choosing him—and the unchanging faithfulness in keeping him, and the almighty power of the Divine will, in the gift of eternal life?⁷ And how can the believer hear his Saviour "knock at the door" of his heart, calling him to fresh communion with himself;⁸ and not to turn to him with the ardent excitement of his love,—"*All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad?*"⁹

But are there not times when we gather no *sweetness* from the word? It is with the spiritual as with the natural food—a want of appetite gives disgust, instead of sweetness and refreshment. An indolent reading of the word without faith—without desire—without application—or with a taste vitiated by contact with the things of sense—deadens the palate—"The full soul loatheth the honey-comb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet."¹⁰

But how melancholy is the thought of the multitudes, that hear, read, understand the word, and yet have never tasted its sweetness! Like Barzillai, they have no sense to "discern between good and evil."¹¹ Full of the word, or of their own conceits—feeding on the delusive enjoyments of creature-comforts—nourishing some baneful corruption in their bosoms¹²—or cankered with the spirit of formality—they have no palate for the things of God; they are "dead in trespasses and sins." But *how sweet is the word* to the hungering and thirsting *taste!* We eat, and are not satisfied. We drink, and long to drink again. "If so be we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, as new-born babes" we shall "desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby."¹³ We shall take heed of any indulgence of the flesh, which may hinder the spiritual enjoyment, and cause us to "loathe" even "angels' food" as "light bread."¹⁴ Instead of resting in our present experience of

¹ Ps. xxxiv. 8.² Ib. xix. 10. Job xxiii. 12.³ Canticles i. 3.⁴ 2 Cor. ii. 14.⁵ John iii. 16.⁶ Matt. xi. 28. Comp. Prov. xvi. 24.⁷ John x. 28.⁸ Rev. iii. 20.⁹ Psalm xiv. 8.¹⁰ Prov. xxvii. 7.¹¹ 2 Samuel xix. 35.¹² See 1 Peter ii. 1, 2.¹³ Ib. 2, 3.¹⁴ Psalm lxxviii. 25. Numb. xxi. 5.

its sweetness, we shall be daily aspiring after higher relish for the heavenly blessing.¹ And will not this experience be a "witness in ourselves" of the heavenly origin of the word? For what arguments could ever persuade us that honey is bitter, at the moment when we are tasting its sweetness? Or who could convince us, that this is the word of man, or the imposture of deceit, when its blessed influence has imparted peace, holiness, joy, support, and rest, infinitely beyond the power of man to bestow? But let this enjoyment—as the spiritual barometer—the pulse of the soul—accurately mark our progress or decline in the Divine life. With our advancement in spiritual health, the word will be increasingly "*sweet to our taste*:" while our declension will be marked by a corresponding abatement in our desires, love, and perception of its delights.

104. *Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.*

THE Psalmist having spoken of the pleasure, now speaks of the profit—of the word—the teaching connected with its sweetness.² Before, he had mentioned the avoiding of sin in order to profit³—now, as the fruit of profit. So closely are they linked together. Man's teaching conveys no *understanding*—God's teaching not only opens the Scriptures, but "opens the understanding to understand them," and the heart to feel their heavenly warmth of life.⁴ Thus having learned "the principles of the doctrine of Christ," we shall "go on to perfection"—"growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ."⁵ Many inconsistencies belong to the young and half-instructed Christian. But when *through the precepts he gets understanding*, he learns to walk more uniformly and steadily, *abiding in the light*. In this spirit and atmosphere springs up a constant and irreconcilable "*hatred of every false way*"—as contrary to the God he loves. These ways will include a thousand devious paths—all meeting in one fearful end—often discovered too late.⁶ In doctrine can we too much turn away from the thought of putting anything—the Church, ordinances, repentance, prayers, in the place of Jesus—another foundation in the stead of that which God himself laid in Zion? Oh for spiritual *understanding to hate this false way* with a deadly hatred! What think we of the ways of the sinful world—so long trusted to for happiness—yet so delusive? The sinner thinks that he has found a treasure, but it proves to be glittering trash—burdensome instead of enriching—only leaving him to the pain of disappointed hope. Rightly are such ways called *false ways*; and of those that tread in them, it is well said, "This their way is their folly."⁷ Strewed they may be with the flowery "pleasures of sin." But they are "hard"⁸ in their walk, and ruin-

¹ *Castæ deliçæ meæ sunt Scripturæ tuæ.*—Augustine.

² Prov. ii. 10, 11; xvi. 21.

³ Verse 101.

⁴ Comp. Luke xxiv. 45, 32.

⁵ Heb. vi. 1.

² Peter iii. 18.

⁶ Prov. v. 11. Matt. xxv. 11, 12.

⁷ Psalm xlix. 13.

⁸ Prov. xiii. 15.

ous in their end.¹ Inquire of those, whose past wanderings justly give weight to their verdict, 'What is your retrospective view of these ways?' Unprofitableness. 'What is your present view of them?' Shame. 'What prospect for eternity would the continuance in them assure to you?' "Death."² Let them then be not only avoided and forsaken, but abhorred; and let every deviation into them from the straight path, however pleasing, be "resisted" even "unto blood."³

But let me ask myself, have I detected the "*false ways*" of my own heart? Little is done in spiritual religion, until my besetting sins are searched out. And let me not be satisfied with forbearance from the outward act. Sin may be restrained, yet not mortified; nor is it enough, that I leave it for the present, but I must renounce it for ever. Let me not part with it as with a beloved friend, with the hope and purpose of renewing my familiarity with it at a "more convenient season:"⁴ but let me shake it from me, as Paul shook off the viper into the fire,⁵ with determination and abhorrence? What! can I wish to hold it? If "*through the precepts of God I have got understanding,*" must not I listen to that solemn, pleading voice, "Oh! do not this abominable thing that I hate?"⁶ No, Lord: let me "pluck it out" of my heart, "and cast it from me."⁷ Oh, for the high blessing of a tender conscience! such as shrinks from the approach, and "abstains from all appearance of evil;"⁸ not venturing to tamper with any self-pleasing way; but "*hating*" it as "*false,*" defiling, destructive! I have marked the apple of my eye—that tenderest particle of my frame—that it is not only offended by a blow or a wound; but that, if so much as an atom of dust find an entrance, it would smart, until it had wept it out. Now such may my conscience be—sensitive of the slightest touch of sin—not only fearful of resisting, rebelling, or "quenching the Spirit," but grieving for every thought of sin, that grieves that blessed Comforter—that tender Friend! To "*hate every false way,*" so as to flee from it, is the highest proof of Christian courage. For never am I better prepared to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,"⁹ than when my conscience is thus set against sin. Would not I then submit to the greatest suffering, rather than be convicted of unfaithfulness to my God?

Lord! turn my eyes, my heart, my feet, my ways, more and more to thy blessed self. Shed abroad thy love in my heart, that sin may be the daily matter of my watchfulness, grief, resistance, and crucifixion.

¹ Matt. viii. 12. Phil. iii. 19.

⁴ Acts xxiv. 25.

⁷ Matt. v. 29.

² Rom. vi. 21.

⁵ Ib. xxviii. 5.

⁸ 1 Thess. v. 22.

³ Heb. xii. 4.

⁶ Jer. xlv. 4.

⁹ 2 Tim. ii. 3.

PART XIV.

105. *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*

THE nightly journeys of Israel were guided by a pillar of fire¹—not only directing their course, but every step and movement.² Thus is our passage in a dark and perilous way irradiated by the *lamp and light of the word*. But except *the lamp* be lighted—except the teaching of the Spirit accompany *the word*, all is darkness—thick darkness. Let us not then be content to read *the word* without obtaining some *light* from it in our understanding—in our experience—in our Providential path. Did we more habitually wait to receive, and watch to improve the light, we should not so often complain of the perplexity of our path. It would generally determine our steps under infallible guidance; while in the presumptuous neglect of it—like Israel of old³—we are sure to come into trouble.

Yet it may sometimes be difficult to trace our light to this heavenly source. *A promise may seem to be applied to my mind, as I conceive, suitable to my present need*. But how may I determine, whether it is “*the lamp of the word*,” or some delusive light from him, who can at any time, for the accomplishment of his own purpose, transform himself “into an angel of light?” Or if a threatening be impressed upon my conscience, how can I accurately distinguish between the voice of “the accuser of the brethren,” and the warning of my heavenly guide? Let me mark the state of my own mind. If I am living in the indulgence of any known sin, or in the neglect of any known duty—if my spirit is careless, or my walk unsteady; a consoling promise, being unsuitable to my case, even though it awakened some excitement of joy, would be of doubtful application. “*The lamp*” of God, *under the circumstances supposed*, would rather reflect the light of conviction than of consolation. For, though God as a Sovereign may speak comfort when and where he pleases; yet we can only expect him to deal with us according to the prescribed rules of his own covenant, chastening, not comforting, his backsliding people.⁴ In a spirit of contrition, however, I should not hesitate to receive a word of encouragement, as *the lamp of God* to direct and cheer my progress; being conscious of that state of feeling, in which the Lord has expressly promised to restore and guide his people.⁵ Let me also inquire into the terms and character of the promise. When he “that dwelleth in the high and holy place,” engages to dwell “with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit;”⁶ any symptoms of tenderness and humility would naturally lead me to consider this word of promise,

¹ Exod. xiii. 21, 22.

² Numb. ix. 15—23.

³ Ib. xiv. 44, 45.

⁴ Comp. Psalm lxxxix. 30—32.

⁵ Comp. Isaiah lvii. 18.

⁶ Ib. 15.

as sent by my kind and watchful Father, to be "*a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*"

Again—a distinct and experimental view of the Saviour in his promises, endearing him to me, and encouraging my trust on his faithfulness and love—this is manifestly light from above.¹ Or if the purpose of the promise answers any proper end—to excite or to encourage to any present duty connected with the promise; I cannot doubt, but *the lamp of the Lord* is directing my path.

For example—when the promise was given to Joshua, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee;"² he could not misconstrue "a word" so "fitly spoken" "in a time of need." And when the same promise was subsequently given to the Church, the application was equally clear, as a dissuasive from inordinate attachment to the things of time and sense, and an encouragement to entire dependence upon the Lord.³

Further—The practical influence of the word will also enable me clearly to distinguish the light of heaven from any illusion of fancy or presumption. The effect of an *unconditional promise* of deliverance given to the Apostle in a moment of extremity, was exhibited in a diligent use of all the appointed means of safety.⁴ An *absolute* promise of prolonged life given to Hezekiah when lying at the point of death, produced the same practical result, in a scrupulous attention to the means for his recovery.⁵ Upon the warrant of a general promise of Divine protection, Ezra and the Jews "fasted, and besought their God for this."⁶ Now in these and other instances, the power of the word, working diligence, simplicity, and prayer, evidently proved its sacred origin. An assurance of safety proceeding from another source, would have produced sloth, carelessness, and presumption; and therefore may I not presume the quickening word in darkness and perplexity, to be the Lord's "*lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path,*" "to guide my feet into the way of peace?"

Let me apply the same test to the threatenings of the word. Its influence, meeting me in a watchful and humble walk with God, I should at once consider as the suggestion of the great enemy of the soul, ever ready to whisper distrust and despondency to the child of God. But in a self-confident, self-indulgent state, I should have as little hesitation in marking an alarming word to be *the light of the word of God*. It would be well for me at such a time to be exercised with fear;⁷ not as arguing any insecurity in my state; but as leading me to "great searchings of heart, to increasing watchfulness, humiliation and prayer." "The commandment is a lamp, and the law is a light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life."⁸ Oh that I may be enabled to make use of this *lamp*, to direct every step of my heavenly way!

Whence then—it may be asked—the various tracks even of the

¹ Comp. 2 Cor. i. 20.

⁴ Acts xxvii. 24, 31.

⁷ Compare 1 Cor. ix. 27.

² Joshua i. 5.

⁵ Isaiah xxxviii. 5, 21.

⁸ Prov. vi. 23.

³ Hebrews xiii. 5.

⁶ Ezra viii. 21—23.

sincere servants of God? Though there is clear light in the word, yet there is remaining darkness in the most enlightened heart. There is no eye without a speck—no eye with perfect singleness of vision—consequently without some liability to error. There is light for the teachable—not for the curious;—light to satisfy faith—not cavilling. Add to this the office of the ministry—the Lord's gracious ordinance for Christian instruction¹ and establishment²—not to enslave,³ but to direct⁴ the judgment in the light of the word. To honor this ordinance is therefore the path of light. To neglect it, is the exposure to all the evils of a wayward will and undisciplined judgment.⁵

Lord! as every action of the day is a step to heaven or hell—Oh! save me from ever turning my face away from the path, into which thy word would guide me. Enable me to avail myself of its light, in the constant exercise of faith, prudence, and simplicity.

106. *I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.*

THE blessing of the guidance of the Lord's word naturally strengthens our resolution to walk in its path. And as if a simple resolution would prove too weak, the Psalmist strengthens it with an oath. Nay more, as if an oath was hardly sufficient security, he seconds it again with a firm resolution, "*I have sworn, and I will perform it.*" 'There shall be but one will between me and my God; and that will shall be his, not mine.' Some timid Christians, under a morbid sense of their weakness, would shrink from this solemn engagement. And some, perhaps, may have burdened their consciences with unadvised or self-dependent obligations.⁶ Still, however, when it is a free-will offering, it is a delightful service, well-pleasing to God. Such it was in the days of Asa, when "*all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them.*"⁷ Vows under the law were both binding and acceptable.⁸ Nor are they less so—in their spirit at least—under

¹ Mal. ii. 7.

² Eph. iv. 10—14.

³ 2 Cor. i. 24. 1 Peter v. 3.

⁴ 2 Cor. xiii. 10. Eph. iv. 13. 1 Thess. iii. 10.

⁵ 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

⁶ It is related of Mr. Pearce, by his excellent biographer, that at the period of the first awakening of his mind—"having read Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion*, he determined formally to dedicate himself to the Lord in the manner recommended in the seventeenth chapter of that work. The form of a covenant there drawn up he also adopted as his own; and that he might bind himself in the most solemn and affecting manner, signed it *with his blood*. But afterwards, failing in his engagements, he was plunged into great distress, and almost into despair. On a review of his covenant, he seems to have accused himself of pharisaical reliance upon the strength of his resolutions, and therefore taking the paper to the top of his father's house, he tore it into small pieces, and threw it from him to be scattered by the wind. He did not, however, consider his obligation to be the Lord's as thereby nullified; but feeling more suspicion of himself, he depended solely upon the blood of the cross."—*Fuller's Life of Pearce*, pp. 3, 4. This instance must be considered, not as an example of the entangling nature of covenant engagements, but as an illustration, by way of contrast, of the enlightened deliberation and simplicity with which they should ever be undertaken. See some admirable remarks on this subject from Mr. Newton's pen.—*Life of Grimshawe*, pp. 16—18.

⁷ 2 Chron. xv. 12—15.

⁸ Num. xxx. 1, 2. Deut. xxiii. 21—23.

“the perfect law of liberty.” A holy promise, originating in serious consideration, and established by a more solemn obligation, so far from being repugnant to the liberty of the Gospel, appears to have been enjoined by God himself;¹ nay, his people are described as animating each other to it, as to a most joyous privilege;² as a renewed act of faith and daily dedication.

Yet we would warn the inconsiderate Christian not to entangle his conscience by *multiplied vows* (as if they were—like prayer—a component part of our daily religion;) nor *by perpetual obligation*—whether of restraint or of extraordinary exercises; nor *by connecting them with trifles*—thus weakening the deep solemnity of the purpose. Christian simplicity must be their principle. Our engagements to God must be grounded on his engagements to us. His faithfulness—not ours³—must be our confidence. There is no innate power in these obligations; and except they be made in self-renouncing dedication, they will only issue in despondency and deeper captivity in sin.

But the inconsiderateness of the unwary is no legitimate argument against their importance. If Jephthah was entangled in a rash and heedless vow,⁴ David manifestly enjoyed the “perfect freedom” of the “service” of his God, when “binding his soul with a bond” equally fixed, but more advised, in its obligation.⁵ And have we, with “the vows of God upon us,”⁶ baptismal vows—perhaps also confirmation or sacramental vows—found our souls brought into bondage by these solemn engagements? Does not a humbling sense of forgetfulness suggest sometimes the need of a more solemn engagement? And may we not thus secure our duty without being ensnared by it? Have not covenanting seasons often restrained our feet from devious paths, and quickened our souls in his service? Daily indeed do we need “the blood of sprinkling” to pardon our innumerable failures, and the Spirit of grace to strengthen us for a more devoted obligation.⁷ But yet in dependence upon the work and Spirit of Christ, often have these holy transactions realized to us a peace and joy, that leads us to look back upon such times as seasons of favored enjoyment. “If” therefore “we sin” in a “perpetual backsliding”⁸ from these engagements, it is still our privilege without presumption to believe, that “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins.”⁹ And as for necessary grace, there is One, who hath said, “My grace is sufficient for thee;”¹⁰ and that One has given no less a proof of his interest in us than by dying for us. May we not therefore trust, that he will “perfect that which concerneth us;”¹¹ that he will “work all our works in us”¹²—“to will and to do of his good pleasure?”¹³

¹ Isaiah xix. 21. Comp. also Isaiah xlv. 5, and Scott on this verse.

² Jer. l. 4, 5.

³ Contrast Matt. xxvi. 35.

⁴ Judges xi. 35.

⁵ Ps. cxvi. 12—14.

⁶ Ps. lvi. 12.

⁷ Gen. xxxv. 1, with xxviii. 20—22. Compare 2 Peter i. 9.

⁸ Jer. viii. 5.

⁹ 1 John ii. 1, 2.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

¹¹ Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

¹² Isaiah xxvi. 12.

¹³ Phil. ii. 13.

Perhaps however "a messenger of Satan" may "buffet us." 'Thou hast broken thy bond; now it will be worse with thee than before.' But did not Jesus die for sins of infirmity, and even of presumption? Does every failing annul the marriage covenant? So neither does every infirmity or backsliding dissolve our covenant with God. Was our faithfulness the basis of this covenant? Rather, does not "the blood of this covenant"¹ make constant provision for our foreseen unfaithfulness? And does not our gracious God overrule even our backsliding to establish a more simple reliance upon himself, and a more circumspect and tender walk before him?

But let us take a case of conscience. A Christian has been drawn away from a set season of extraordinary devotion by some unforeseen present duty, or some unlooked-for opportunity of actively glorifying God. Has he then broken his obligation? Certainly not. It was, *or ought to have been, formed* with an implied subserviency to paramount duty. It cannot therefore be impaired by any such providential interference. Yet let it not be a light matter to remove a free-will offering from the altar. Let godly care be exercised to discover the subtle indulgence of the flesh in the service of God. Let double diligence redeem the lost privilege of more immediate and solemn self-dedication. In guarding against legal bondage, let us not mistake the liberty of the flesh for the liberty of the Gospel. Let us be simple, and ready for self-denying service; and the Lord our God will not fail to vouchsafe "some token for good."

"Come" then, my fellow Christian, "and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, never to be forgotten"² by God; never to be forsaken by us. Let each of us renew our surrender, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant;" I offer myself to thee. "Thou hast loosed my bonds."³ Oh! bind me to thyself with fresh bonds of love, that may never be loosed. Glad am I, that I am anything—though the meanest of all; that I have anything—poor and vile as it is—capable of being employed in thy service. I yield myself to Thee with my full bent of heart and will, entirely and for ever; asking only, that I may be "a vessel meet for the Master's use."⁴

107. *I am afflicted very much; quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word.*

It would seem, that this holy saint's covenanting season was a time of deep *affliction*; while his determined resolution to "*keep*" God's word of obedience, gave boldness to his pleading, that God would perform his word of promise, "*Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy word.*" And this is our high privilege, that we are permitted to pour our troubles into the ear of One, who is able perfectly to enter into, and to sympathize with us in them; "who knoweth our frame,"⁵ who hath himself laid the affliction upon us:⁶ yea, more than all, who in "all our affliction is" himself "afflicted;"⁷

¹ Heb. xiii. 20.

² Jer. l. 5.

³ Psalm cxvi. 16.

⁴ 2 Tim. ii. 21.

⁵ Psalm ciii. 14.

⁶ Ib. xxxix. 9.

⁷ Isaiah lxxiii. 9.

and who "suffered being tempted, that he might be able to succor them that are tempted."¹ There are none—not even those most dear to us—to whom we can unbosom ourselves, as we do to our heavenly Friend. Our wants, griefs, burdens of every kind—we roll them all upon him, with special relief in the hour of affliction. An affecting contrast to those, who are indeed "*afflicted very much*;" whose souls, "drawing nigh unto death," and knowing no refuge, are ready to burst with their own sorrows, "the sorrows of the world"—unmitigated—unrelieved—"working death!"²

There is a "need be"³ for the *afflictions* of the Lord's people. The stones of the spiritual temple cannot be polished or fitted to their place without the strokes of the hammer. The gold cannot be purified without the furnace. The vine must be pruned for greater fruitfulness.⁴ The measure of discipline varies indefinitely. But such is the inveteracy of fleshly lusts, that *very much affliction* may often be the needful regimen.⁵ Yet will it be tempered by one, who knows the precise measure,⁶ who can make no mistakes in our constitutions, and whose fatherly pity will chasten "not for his pleasure, but for our profit."⁷ And need we speak of the alleviations of our trials, that they are infinitely disproportioned to our deserts⁸—that they are "light, and but for a moment," compared with eternity⁹—that greater comfort is vouchsafed in the endurance of them, than we even venture to anticipate from their removal¹⁰—that the fruit at the end more than balances the trials themselves?¹¹ Need we say—how richly they ought to be prized, as conforming us to the image of our suffering Lord; how clearly we shall one day read in them our Father's commission, as messengers of love; and how certainly "the end of the Lord" will be "that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy?"¹²

Perhaps affliction—at least *very much affliction*—may not be our present lot. Yet it is our duty and wisdom, as the good soldier in the time of truce, to burnish our armor for the fight. "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off. Because the wicked have no changes, therefore they fear not God."¹³ The continual changes in Christian experience may well remind us of the necessity of "walking humbly with God," that we may not, by an unprepared spirit, lose the blessing of the sanctified cross. How many of the Lord's dear children may bear Ephraim's name, "*For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction!*"¹⁴ Sometimes they are so conscious of the present good, that they dread affliction *leaving* them, more, probably, than the inexperienced professor dreads its *coming*.

But great affliction is as hard to bear as great prosperity. Some whose Christian profession had drawn out the esteem of others—perhaps also their own complacency—have shown by "faintness in

¹ Heb. ii. 18.² 2 Cor. vii. 10.³ Peter i. 6, 7.⁴ John xv. 2.⁵ 2 Cor. xii. 7.⁶ Job xxxiv. 23.⁷ Psalm ciii. 13, 14. Heb. xii. 10.⁸ Ezra ix. 13.⁹ 2 Cor. iv. 17.¹⁰ Ib. xii. 8—10.¹¹ Deut. viii. 15, 16, Jer. xxix. 11.¹² James v. 11, with Job xlii. 10—12.¹³ 1 Kings xx. 11. Psalm lv. 19.¹⁴ Gen. xli. 52.

the day of extremity their strength to be small,¹ and themselves to be almost untaught in this school of discipline—shaken, confused, broken. Special need indeed have we under the smart of the rod, of *quicken*ing grace, to preserve us from stout-heartedness or dejection. We think we could bear the stroke, did we know it to be paternal, not judicial. Have we, then “forgotten the exhortation, which speaketh unto us *as unto children?*” Do we despise the chastening of the Lord? “*Quicken me, O Lord,*” that I may be preserved in a humble, wakeful, listening posture, to hear and improve the message of thy blessing of the sanctified cross.’ Do we “faint, when we are rebuked of him?”² “*Quicken me, O Lord.*” that I sink not under the “blow of thy hand.”³ Thus will this Divine influence save us from the horrible sin of being offended with God in our fretting spirit. We shall receive his chastisement with humility without despondency, and with reverence without distrust; hearkening to the voice that speaks, while we tremble under the rod that strikes: yet so mingling fear with confidence, that we may at the same moment adore the hand which we feel, and rest in the mercy that is promised.⁴ Our best support, in the depths of affliction, is for “*quicken*ing, according to thy word!” And which of the exercised children of God has ever found “one jot or one tittle of it to fail?” “Patience working experience, and experience hope, and hope making not ashamed,” in the sense of “the love of God shed abroad upon the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”—all this is the abundant answer to our prayer, “Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles, *shalt quicken me again,* and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.”⁵ Nothing will bear looking back to with comfort, like those trials, which though painful to the flesh, have tended to break our spirit, mould our will, and strengthen the simplicity of our walk with God.

108. *Accept, I beseech thee, the free-will offerings of my mouth, O Lord: and teach me thy judgments.*

As the first fruits of his entire self-devotion to the Lord;⁶ as the only service he could render in his affliction; and as an acknowledgment of his answered prayer for *quicken*ing grace,⁷ behold this faithful servant of God presenting “*the free-will offerings of his mouth for acceptance.*” Such he knew to be an acceptable service. For the sacrifices of the Old Testament were not only typical of the One sacrifice for sin, but of the spiritual worship of the people of God.⁸ To those who are interested in the atonement of Jesus, there needeth “no more sacrifice for sin.” That which is now required of us, and in which we would delight, is to “take

¹ Prov. xxiv. 10. Comp. Jonah iv. 5—9.

² Psalm xxxix. 10; xxxviii. 1—3.

³ Rom. v. 3—5, with Psalm lxxi. 20, 21.

⁴ Compare Psalm li. 16, 17. Mal. iii. 3, with Phil. iv. 18.

⁵ Heb. xii. 5.

⁶ Mic. vii. 8, 9.

⁷ Verse 106.

⁸ Verse 107.

⁸ Compare Psalm li. 16, 17. Mal. iii. 3, with Phil. iv. 18. Heb. xiii. 15, 16. 1 Peter ii. 5.

with us words, and turn to him, and say unto him—Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render *the calves of our lips.*¹

No offering but a “*free-will offering*” is accepted. Such was the service under the law:² such must it be under the Gospel.³ Yet neither can this offering be accepted until the offerer has found acceptance with his God. “The Lord had respect,” first to the person of “Abel,” then “to his offering.”⁴ But if our persons are covered with the robe of acceptance—if the “offering up of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” has “perfected” us before God;⁵ however defiled our services may be, however mixed with infirmity, and in every way most unworthy; even a God of ineffable holiness “beholds no iniquity”⁶ in them. No offering is so pure as to obtain acceptance in any other way; no offering so sinful as to fail of acceptance in this way. Most abundant indeed and satisfactory is the provision made in heaven for the continual and everlasting acceptance of our polluted and distracted services—“Another angel came, and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it, with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand.”⁷ With such a High Priest and Intercessor, not only is unworthiness dismissed, but boldness and assurance of faith is encouraged.⁸

But, as we remarked, it was “*a free-will offering*” that was here presented—the overflowings of a heart filled with love. No constraint was necessary. Prayer was delightful. He was not forced upon his knees. Let me seek fellowship with him in presenting my *free-offering* before my God. Does not he love it?⁹ Does not his free love to me deserve it?¹⁰ Did not my beloved Saviour give *a free-will offering* of delight—nay even of joy?¹¹ And shall not his free-flowing love be my pattern and my principle?¹² Shall his offering be free for me, and mine be reluctant for him? Shall he be ready with his blood for me, and I be backward with *my mouth* for him? “Oh my God, work thine own Almighty work—make me not only living, but *willing* in the day of thy power.”¹³ Let the stream flow in the full tide of affectionate devotedness. Blessed Jesus! I would be thine, and none other’s. I would tell the world, that I am captivated by thy love, and consecrated to thy service. Oh let me “*rejoice, for that I offered willingly.*” Great grace is it, that he is willing to accept my service. For what have I to offer, that is not already “his own?”¹⁴ But let me not forget to suppli-

¹ Hosea xiv. 2. Comp. Ps. liv. 6.

² Num. xxix. 39. Deut. xvi. 10. ² Chron. xxxi. 14. Amos iv. 4.

³ Rom. xii. 1. ² Cor. v. 14, 15; viii. 5.

⁴ Gen. iv. 4, 5.

⁵ Heb. x. 10.

⁶ Num. xxiii. 21.

⁷ Rev. viii. 3, 4.

⁸ Heb. iv. 14—16; x. 21, 22.

⁹ ² Cor. ix. 7.

¹⁰ Eph. ii. 4, 5.

¹¹ Ps. xl. 8. Heb. xii. 2.

¹² ² Cor. v. 14, 15.

¹³ Ps. cx. 3.

¹⁴ 1 Chron. xxix. 9, 14, 17.

cate for further instruction—"Teach me thy judgments," that I may be directed to present a purer offering; that by more distinct and accurate knowledge of thy ways, my love may be enlarged, and my obedience more entire, until I "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."¹

109. *My soul is continually in my hand, yet do I not forget thy law.* 110. *The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts.*

PRECARIOUS health, or familiarity with the dangers of war, may give peculiar emphasis to the phrase (of not unfrequent use in the word of God²)—"My soul is continually in my hand." David, in his early public life, was in constant apprehension from the open violence³ and the secret machinations⁴ of his bitter enemy. Hunted down "as a partridge in the mountains,"⁵ and often scarcely escaping the "snare, which the wicked laid for him,"⁶ at one time he could but acknowledge—"there is but a step between me and death;"⁷ at another time he was tempted to say, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul."⁸ Subsequently the hand of his own son was aimed at his throne and his life.⁹ Yet could no peril shake his undaunted adherence to *the law and precepts of God.*¹⁰

What was the life of Jesus upon earth? Through the enmity of foes—various, opposite, yet combined¹¹—his "*soul was continually in his hand.*" Yet how wonderful was his calmness and serenity of mind, when surrounded by them all, like "lions" in power, "dogs" in cruelty, wolves in malice!¹² A measure of this spirit belongs to every faithful disciple—not natural courage, but "the spirit of power," as the gift of God,¹³ enabling him in the path of *the precepts* "to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."¹⁴

Let us again mark this confidence, illustrated in the open trials of the servants of God. Mark the Apostle, when "the Holy Ghost witnessed to him in every city, that bonds and imprisonment awaited him." "None of these things"—said he—"move me. I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."¹⁵ He could look "tribulation, or persecution, or peril, or sword," in the face; and while he "*carried his soul continually in his hand,*" in true Christian heroism, in the most exalted triumph of faith, he could say in the name of himself and his companions in tribulation, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors." Nothing could make him flinch. Nothing could turn him back. Nothing could wring the love of the service of his God out of his heart. His principle was found invincible in the hour of trial—not, however, as a native energy of his heart, but "*through him that loved him.*"¹⁶ Did he not speak and

¹ Col. iv. 12.

² Comp. Judges xii. 3. 1 Sam. xix. 5; xxviii. 21. Job xiii. 14.

³ 1 Sam. xviii. 10, 11; xix. 9, 10. ⁴ Ib. xviii. 17; xix. 11—17. ⁵ Ib. xxvi. 20.

⁶ The men of Keilah, Ib. xxi. 11, 12. The Ziphites, Ib. xxiii. 9. xxvi. 1.

⁷ Ib. xx. 3.

⁸ Ib. xxvii. 1.

⁹ 2 Sam. xv. 13, 14; xvii. 1—3.

¹⁰ Verse 87.

¹¹ Luke xxiii. 12.

¹² Ps. xxii. 16, 20, 21, with Isaiah liii. 7.

¹³ 2 Tim. i. 7.

¹⁴ Eph. vi. 13.

¹⁵ Acts xv. 23, 24; xxi. 13.

¹⁶ Rom. viii. 37.

live the spirit of this fearless confidence, “*Yet do I not forget thy law?*” Daniel’s history again shows the utter impotency of secret devices to produce apostasy in the children of God. When *the wicked*, after many an ineffectual attempt to “find occasion or fault” were driven to *lay a snare for him* in “the law of his God,”¹ this noble confessor of the faith continued to “kneel upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, *as he did aforetime.*”² The den of lions was far less fearful in his eyes, than one devious step from the straight and narrow path.³ Sin was dreaded as worse than a thousand deaths. He surely then could have said, “*Yet I erred not from thy precepts.*”

But how striking must it have been to David, in his imminent peril, to have seen the “counsel of Ahithophel”—regarded as oracular, when employed in the cause of God—now, when directed against the Church, “turned to foolishness!”⁴—an instance, “only one of a thousand,” of the ever-watchful keeping of the Great Head and Guardian of his Church.⁵ Thus does he overrule the devices of the enemy for the establishment of his people’s dependence upon himself. “The wrath of man praiseth him,”⁶ and he “taketh the wise in his own craftiness.”⁷

But the day of difficulty is a “perilous time” in the Church. “Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried.”⁸ Have we been able to sustain the shock in a steady adherence to *the law and precepts of God?*⁹ This is indeed the time, when genuine faith will be found of inestimable value. In such a time, David experienced the present blessing of having chosen the Lord for his God. When clouds began to gather blackness, and surrounding circumstances to the eye of sense engendered despondency—faith realized All-sufficient support; and “David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”¹⁰ And is not David’s God “our God, the health of our countenance,”¹¹ the guide of our path,¹² the God of our salvation?¹³ Oh! let us not rest, till his confidence becomes ours, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.”¹⁴

But the cross, that proves and establishes the Christian, sifts the unsound professor as chaff. Nothing but this *solid principle* of faith can resist either the persecution¹⁵ or *the snare.*¹⁶ Many desire conformity to Christ and his people in everything but in their cross. They would attain their honor without the steps that led them to it. Dread this flinching spirit. Reject it—as did our Lord—with indignation. It “savoreth not of God.” It is the voice of Satan,¹⁷ who would promise a pillow of carnal ease under our heads—a path of roses under our feet—but a path of slumber, of delusion, and of ruin.

The time of special need is at hand with us all, when we shall

¹ Dan. vi. 5.

² Ib. 6—10.

³ Compare Luke xii. 4, 5.

⁴ Compare 2 Samuel xvi. 23, with xv. 31; xvii. 14.

⁵ Isaiah xxxvii. 3.

⁶ Psalm lxxvi. 10.

⁷ Job v. 13, with 1 Cor. iii. 19.

⁸ Dan. xii. 10.

⁹ Verses 51, 69. Rev. ii. 10.

¹⁰ 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

¹¹ Psalm xlii. 11.

¹² Ib. xlvi. 14.

¹³ Ib. lxviii. 20.

¹⁴ Ps. lvi. 3.

¹⁵ Matt. xiii. 20, 21.

¹⁶ 1 Kings xiii. 11—19.

¹⁷ Matt. xvi. 22, 23.

need substance and reality for our support—the true confidence of a living faith. Those who have never felt the nearness of eternity, can have but a faint idea of what we shall need in the hour, when “flesh and heart fail,”¹ to fix a sure unshaken foot upon “the Rock of Ages.” “Watch therefore;” for you know not² how soon you may be ready to say, “*My soul is in my hand,*” quivering on the eve of departure to the Judge. “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning! and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for the Lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him *immediately*. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.”³

111. *Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.*

‘PRECIOUS Bible! what a treasure!’ *The testimonies of God*—the declaration of his will in doctrine—obligation—and privilege! David had felt their value, as the stay of his soul in shaking and sifting trial.⁴ But how did he claim his interest in them? Not by purchase, or by merit, it was his *heritage*. As a child of Abraham, he was an “heir according to promise.”⁵ *They*—all that is contained in them, “the Lord himself,” the sum and substance of all, “was the portion of his *inheritance*.”⁶ Man looks at his *heritage*. ‘This land—this estate—or this kingdom is mine.’ The child of God looks round on the universe—on both worlds—on God himself with his infinite perfections—and says, “All things are mine.”⁷ My title is more sure than to any earthly *heritage*. Every promise is sprinkled with “the blood of the everlasting covenant,” as the seal of its blessings, and the pledge of their performance.

But not only are they *my heritage*:—But by my own intelligent choice *I have taken* them so. A blessing is it to have them. But the blessing of blessings is to have them made good—applied—sealed—*made my own*; so that, like the minor come to age, I take possession of my *heritage*, I live on it, I live in it, it is my treasure, my portion. If a man is known by his *heritage*, let me be known by mine. Let it be “known and read of all men,” that I count not the world my happiness, but that I take my Bible, ‘Here is my *heritage*. Here I can live royally—richer upon bare promises than all the treasures of earth could make me. My resources never fail, when all besides fail.⁸ When all earthly heritage shall have passed away, mine endureth *for ever*.’⁹

Let me not then entertain a low estimate of this precious *heritage*. “Heirs of promise” are entitled to “strong consolation.”¹⁰ What belongs to a joint-heir with Christ, interested in the un-

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 26.

² Mark xiii. 35, 36.

³ Luke xii. 35—37.

⁴ Verses 109, 110.

⁵ Gal iii. 29.

⁶ Ps. xvi. 5.

⁷ 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22.

⁸ Hab. iii. 17, 18. Ps. lxxiii. 26.

⁹ 1 Peter i. 24, 25.

¹⁰ Heb. vi. 17, 18.

changing love of Jehovah from eternity, but the language of triumphant exultation? The first view, as it passed before my eyes, was the *rejoicing of my heart*; and never could I be satisfied, till I had *taken it* as my soul-satisfying and eternal portion.

Need we then entreat you, believer, to exhibit to the world, that the promises of your *heritage* are not an empty sound—that they impart a Divine reality of support and enjoyment—and that an interest in them habitually realized is a blessed, a heavenly portion? Should your heart, however, at any time be captivated by the transient prospect before your eyes: should you be led to imagine some substantial value in this world's treasures—you will have forgotten the peculiar pre-eminence of your heritage—its enduring character. But what are the gaudy follies—the glittering emptiness of this passing scene, in comparison with your heavenly prospects, or even of your present sources of enjoyment?

We can readily account for the affecting indifference, with which “the men of the world” barter away these treasures, as Esau did his birthright, for very trifles.² They have no present interest in them. “They have their portion in this life. They have received their consolation.”³ But oh! how soon, having spent their all, will they “begin to be in” infinite eternal “want!”⁴ Yet, having no interest in this heavenly *heritage*, they can have no pleasure in surveying it. If, therefore, conscience imposes upon them the drudgery of casting their careless eye over it, what wonder if they should find nothing to enliven their hopes, or to attract their hearts? What communion can worldly hearts hold with this heavenly treasure? What spiritual light, as the source of heavenly comfort, can penetrate this dark recess? As well might the inhabitant of the subterraneous cavern expect the cheerful light of the sun; as the man, whose eyes and heart are in the centre of the earth, enjoy the spiritual perception of an interest in “*the heritage*,” of the people of God. If, however, the darkness and difficulties of the word are pleaded in excuse for ignorance; let those indolent triflers confess, how small a portion of that persevering devotedness, which has been employed in gathering together the perishing stores of this world, has been given to search into this hidden mine of unsearchable riches!

Oh, my soul, if I can lay claim to this blessed “*heritage*,” I envy not the miser his gold! Rather would I adore that grace, which has “made me to differ” from him; and given me a far happier and far richer *heritage*. But let me be daily enriching myself from this imperishable store; so that, poor as I am in myself, and seeming to “have nothing,” I may in reality be “possessing all things.”⁵ Let the recollection of the rich heritage of light, comfort, peace and strength, furnished in the word, be my abundant joy; and bind my heart to a closer adherence to its obligations, and to a more habitual apprehension of its privileges.

¹ Rom. viii. 17—34.

² Heb. xii. 16. Gen. xxv. 29—34.

³ Ps. xvii. 14. Luke vi. 24.

⁴ Luke xv. 14.

⁵ 2 Cor. vi. 10.

112. *I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end.*

THE Psalmist had just been *rejoicing* in his privileges. He now binds himself to his obligations—and *that* not for a day—but *even to the end*. Observe where he begins his work—not with the eye—the ear—the tongue—but with *the heart*, “for out of the heart are the issues of life.”¹ And yet this *inclining of the heart to the Lord’s statutes* is as much the work of God as to create a world; and as soon could “the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots,” as we could “do good, who are accustomed to do evil.”² And David was very far from meaning that any act of his own power could turn the channel of his affections out of their natural course. But prayer, such as he had often poured out,³ sets every principle of the soul in action, and in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, he *inclines his heart*. Thus we do what we do; but God enables us, “preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will”⁴—not working without or against us, but in us—through us—with us—by us. His preventing grace makes the first impression, and his assisting grace enables us to follow.⁵ Weak indeed are our purposes, and fading our resolutions, unsupported by Divine grace. Yet renewing strength “is given to the waiting” Christian, even to “mount upon eagles’ wings, to run without weariness, and to walk without fainting.”⁶ Conscious as we are, that “without Christ we can do nothing,” it is no less true, that we “can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth us.”⁷ Let us exercise then the grace already given, in dependence upon a continued supply; and turning to him with freedom and delight, we shall *incline our hearts with full purpose to perform his statutes alway, even unto the end*. This is God’s way of quickening the dead soul to life and motion, alluring it by an inexpressible sweetness, and at the same moment, by an invincible power, drawing it to himself.

Every step indeed to the end will be a conflict with indwelling sin, in the form of remaining enmity, sloth, or unbelief. But how encouraging it is to trace every tender prayer, every contrite groan, every spiritual desire, to the assisting, upholding influence of the “free Spirit of God!”⁸ The continual drawing of the Spirit will be the principle to perseverance. The same hand that gave the new bias for a heavenward motion will be put forth to quicken that motion, even unto the end. ‘I can hardly hold on,’ the believer might say, ‘from one step to another. How can I then dare to hope, that I shall hold on a constant course—a daily conflict, “unto the end?”’ But was it not Almighty power, that supported the first step in your course? And is not the same Divine help pledged to every successive step of difficulty? Doubt not then that “He is faithful that hath promised.”⁹ dare to be confident of this very thing, that he

¹ Prov. iv. 23.

² Jer. xiii. 23.

³ Verses 36, 37.

⁴ Art. x.

⁵ Jer. xxxi. 18.

⁶ Isaiah xl. 31.

⁷ John xv. 5, with Phil. iv. 13.

⁸ See Rom. viii. 26. Psalm li. 12.

⁹ Heb. x. 23.

which hath "begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."¹ And in this confidence go on to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."²

PART XV.

113. *I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love.*

THE fall of man has misplaced his affections. Love was originally made for God and *his law*—hatred for sin. Now man loves what he ought to hate,³ and hates what he ought to love.⁴ The work of Divine grace is to restore the disordered affections to their proper centre, and to bestow them on their right object—*hating vain thoughts, and loving the law of God*. Few think of the responsibility of their thoughts; as if they were too trifling to be connected with any solemn account. The enlightened soul however learns to make a conscience of his thoughts. Here is the seminal principle of sin.⁵ How must a radical remedy be applied.

Vain thoughts are the natural produce of the unrenewed heart, and of the yet unrenewed part of the believer's heart. Who that "knows the plague of his own heart," and the spirituality of the Christian walk with God, does not constantly complain of their baneful influence! The child of God longs that his "every thought may be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."⁶ But he "sees another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind;" so that when he would "do good, evil is present with him."⁷ When he would "attend upon the Lord without distraction;"⁸ many times, even in a single exercise, does he forget his sacred employment. Sin seems to enter into every pore of his soul; and a cloud of *vain thoughts* darkens every avenue to communion with God. He would gladly say, "My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed;"⁹ but he finds his affections wandering, as "the eyes of the fool, in the ends of the earth,"¹⁰ as if there were no object of Divine attraction to his soul. We do not hear the worldling, or indeed the servant of God in his worldly employments, complaining of this burden. He can bring to deep, important, and anxious concerns of this world, all that intensity and fixedness of attention which the emergency may demand. Indeed the wily adversary would rather assist than hinder this concentration of mind, as diverting

¹ Phil. i. 6. ² Phil. ii. 12, 13. ³ John iii. 19. Rom. i. 32; vi. 13.

⁴ Job xxi. 14. Ps. xiv. 1. Rom. viii. 7.

⁵ Gen. vi. 5. Prov. xxiii. 7; xxiv. 9.

⁶ 2 Cor. x. 5.

⁷ Rom. vii. 21, 23.

⁸ 1 Cor. vii. 35.

⁹ Ps. lvii. 7.

¹⁰ Prov. xvii. 24.

the soul from the far more momentous and interesting subjects of eternity. But never do the "sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord," except "Satan comes also among them."¹

"*Vain thoughts*" are his ceaseless hinderances to our spiritual communion with God. Are we aware of the subtilty, and therefore the peculiar danger of this temptation? We should instinctively start from an enticement to open transgression. The incursion of defiling or blasphemous thoughts would be such a burden, that we should "have no rest in our spirit," while they remain undisturbed within us. But perhaps neither of these temptations are so formidable as the crowd of thoughts of every kind, incessantly running to and fro in the mind; the indulgence of which, though not actually sinful in itself, yet as effectually restrains the soul from intercourse with God, as the most hateful injections. These are "the little foxes, that spoil the tender grapes."² Nay—the "*thoughts*" may be even spiritual in their nature, and yet "*vain*" in their tendency; because unsuitable to the present frame, and calculated, and indeed intended by the great enemy, to divert the mind from some positive duty. Who has not felt a serious thought upon an unseasonable subject, and at an unseasonable time, to be in its consequences a "*vain thought*"—the secret impulse of the false "angel of light,"³ dividing the attention between two things, so that neither of them may be wholly done, done to any purpose, done at all? If at any time "iniquity has been regarded in the heart;" if the world in any of its thousand forms has regained a temporary ascendancy: or if lusting imaginations are not constantly "held in" as "with bit and bridle;" these "*vain thoughts*," ever ready to force their entrance, will at such seasons, "get an advantage of us." Restless in their workings, they keep no Sabbaths: and can only be successfully met by a watchful and unceasing warfare.

It may indeed be sometimes difficult, in the midst of this continued trial, to maintain a clear sense of adoption. But this is the distinctive mark of Christian sincerity. Do we cordially "*hate*" them, as exceeding sinful in the sight of God,⁴ hurtful to our own souls,⁵ and contrary to our new nature?⁷ If we cannot altogether prevent

¹ Job i. 6.² Cant. ii. 15.³ 2 Cor. xi. 14.

⁴ Greenham (one of the most valuable of the Puritan writers upon experimental subjects) used to bring his distractions of mind to this test—If they brought any past sin to mind for his humiliation, or any comfort to excite his thankfulness, or any instruction suitable to the present moment—he took them to be of God. But if they *drew off his mind from present duty* to rove after other objects, he suspected their source, and girded himself to prayer for increasing steadiness of application to the matter in hand. See his works, folio, p. 23. Being asked to account for distractions in holy meditations, he said—It was either want of preparation and sanctifying the heart by prayer before we set upon so holy an exercise, and therefore a rebuke from the Lord for our "presumption in being bold to work upon holy matters in our own strength"—or else a dependence upon a general purpose of thinking good, or restraining evil, without fastening our minds upon some particular object, but rather 'ranging up and down,' leaving some part of our mind and meditation void for other matters, without wholly and seriously setting on a thing propounded. When any complained to him of blasphemous thoughts, he would say—"Do not fear them, but abhor them."

⁵ Prov. xxiv. 9.⁶ Cant. ii. 15, and Scott, *in loco*.⁷ Rom. vii. 22.

their entrance, or eject them from their settlement, are we careful not to invite them, not to entertain them, not to suffer them to "*lodge within*"¹ us? This active *hatred* is a satisfactory proof that they are not so much the natural suggestion of the heart, as the injections of the enemy of our peace. They are at least so directly opposed to our better will and dominant bias, that we may say, "If I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin, that dwelleth in me."² Our affliction and conflict with them prove that they dwell with us—not as welcome guests, or as the family of the house—but as "thieves and robbers." Their indulgence constitutes our sin. Their indwelling may be considered *only as our temptation*. They supply indeed continued matter for watchfulness, humiliation, and resistance; yet so far as they are abhorred and resisted, they are rather our infirmities than our iniquities, and leave no stain of actual guilt upon the conscience. An increasing sense of the sinfulness of sin, and of the extent of duty, will indeed show their deeper aggravations and more persevering opposition. Still, however, even while we groan under their defiling, distracting influence in our best services, we may assure our confidence in him, who "spareth us, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him,"³ and who will ever gather up the broken parts of our prayers with merciful acceptance.

But the subjugation of this evil—even though we be secured from its condemnation—is a matter of the deepest concern. Forget not—oh, may the impression be indelible!—that it was for these *vain thoughts* that the Saviour was nailed to the cross. Here lies the ground of self-loathing—the quickening principle of conflict and exertion. Let the heart—the seat of this evil disease—be daily washed in the cleansing blood of Calvary; for until the corrupt fountain be cleansed, it must ever "send forth bitter waters."⁴ Let it be diligently "kept,"⁵ and carefully filled, so that it may be a "good treasure bringing forth good things."⁶ Let there be the continued exercise of that "watchfulness" "which is unto prayer,"⁷ combined with an unflinching adherence to plain and obvious duty. Let the temptation to desist awhile from services so polluted, that they appear rather to mock God than to worship him, be met on the onset with the most determined opposition. Once admit this suggestion, and our active enemy will pour in successive incursions of *vain thoughts* into our perplexed and yielding minds, to turn us back step by step in our attempts to approach to God. If, therefore, we cannot advance as we could wish, let us advance as we can. If a connected train of thought or expression fails us, let us only change—not surrender—our posture of resistance; substituting sighs, desires, tears, and groaning for words, and casting ourselves upon our God in the simple confidence of faith, "Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee.

¹ Compare Jer. iv. 14.

² Rom. vii. 20.

³ Malachi iii. 17.

⁴ Compare 2 Kings ii. 19—22. Jer. iv. 14.

⁵ Proverbs iv. 23.

⁶ Matthew xii. 35.

⁷ Ib. xxvi. 41.

Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?"¹ It is far better to wander in duty than from it. For if *any duty* be neglected on account of the defilement that is mingled with it, for the same reason we must neglect *every other duty*: and, as the final consequence, the worship of God would be abolished from the earth.

Much of our successful warfare, however, depends upon an accurate and well-digested acquaintance with our own hearts—upon a discovery of the bias of the mind in our unoccupied moments, and of the peculiar seasons and circumstances that give most power to temptation. This once known, set a double watch against those doors, by which the enemy has been accustomed to find his most convenient and unobstructed entrance.

But we must not forget the effective means suggested by David's experience—the *love of God's law*. Here rises the native enmity against God—not as the Creator, but the Lawgiver—and therefore against his law as the dictate of his will.² Here then is the power of grace subduing this enmity. Not only I fear, and therefore through fear I keep, but *I love, thy law*. And 'He that loves a holy law,' remarks an excellent old writer, 'cannot but hate a vain thought.'³ For if the law be the transcript of the image of God, the thoughts affectionately drawn out towards him must naturally fix the image of the beloved friend upon the mind, and by a sweet constraint fasten down the thoughts to Divine contemplation. Are we then ever winged with an elevating love to the Saviour? And do not we find our hearts start out from their worldly employments with frequent glances and flights towards the object of our desire? And will not this communion of love gradually mould the soil into a fixed delight, exciting our *hatred*, and strengthening our resistance of every sinful affection? Thus, as *love to the law* stirs up the powers of the renewed man, "spiritual wickedness" will be abhorred, conflicted with, and overcome.

Yet these defilements will remain to die with the last breathings of the old man; which though crucified indeed, and expiring, will struggle with fearful strength and unabated enmity to the end. And let them remain as humbling mementos of our unclean nature, "shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin;"⁴ and as enlivening our anticipations of that blessed place, where "shall in no wise enter anything that defileth;"⁵ where "*vain thoughts*," and whatever besides might "separate between us and our God," will be unknown for ever. Meanwhile let them endear to us the free justification of the Gospel; let them lead us daily and hourly to "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness;"⁶ and enhance in our view that heavenly intercession, which provides for the perfect cleansing and acceptance of services even such as ours.

Blessed contemplation! Jesus prays not for us as we do for ourselves. His intercession is without distraction—without interrup-

¹ Ps. xxxviii. 9; lvi. 8.

² Rom. viii. 7.

³ Steele's Antidote against Distractions.

⁴ Psalm. li. 5.

⁵ Rev. xxi. 27.

⁶ Zech. xiii. 1.

tion. If we are then so dead, that we cannot, and so guilty that we dare not, pray, and so wandering in our "*vain thoughts*," that our prayers appear to be scattered to the winds, rather than to ascend to heaven—if on these accounts combined, we "are so troubled that we cannot speak;"¹ yet always is there one to speak for us, of whom "a voice from heaven" testified for our encouragement, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."² With such hopes, motives, and encouragements, let us "continue instant in prayer,"³ *until we pray, and that we may pray*. Let us supplicate our Lord with restless importunity, that his omnipotent love would take hold of these hearts, which every moment sin and Satan seem ready to seize. At the same time, conscious of our hatred of every interruption to his service, and of the simplicity of our affection to his holy law, let us hold fast that confidence before him, which will issue in perfect peace and established consolation.

114. *Thou art my hiding-place, and my shield; I hope in thy word.*

WE have seen the unremitting vigilance of the enemy pursuing the man of God in his secret retirement with painful distraction. See how he runs to *his hiding-place*. Here is our main principle of safety—not our strivings, or our watchfulness, but our faith. Flee instantly to Jesus.⁴ He is the sinner's *hiding-place*, "the man," that wondrous man, "in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."⁵ Yes, Jesus exposed himself to the fury of "the tempest," that he might provide "*a hiding-place*" for us. The broken law pursued with its relentless curse—"The sinner ought to die"—But "*thou art my hiding-place*," who hast "redeemed me from the curse of the law, being made a curse for me."⁶ "The fiery darts" pour in on every side; but the recollection of past security awakens my song of acknowledgment, "Thou hast been a strength to the poor, to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall."⁷ Our *hiding-place* covers us from the power of the world. "In me," saith our Saviour, "ye shall have peace. Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."⁸ Helpless to resist the great enemy, our Lord brings us to his wounded side, and hides us there. We "overcome him by the blood of the Lamb."⁹ To all accusations from every quarter, our challenge is ready, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"¹⁰ From the fear of death, our *hiding-place* still covers us. "Jesus through death hath destroyed him that had the power of death."¹¹ Against the sting of this last enemy, a song of thanksgiving is put into our mouth, "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? Thanks be to God,

¹ Ps. lxxvii. 4.

⁴ Ps. cxlii. 9. Prov. xviii. 10.

⁶ Gal. iii. 10, 13.

⁹ Rev. xii. 11.

² Matt. iii. 17.

⁵ Isaiah xxxii. 2. Col. ii. 9.

⁷ Isaiah xxv. 4.

¹⁰ Rom. viii. 33, 34.

³ Rom. xii. 12.

⁸ John xvi. 33.

¹¹ Heb. ii. 14, 15.

which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹ Thus is “the smoking flax,” which the malice of Satan strives to extinguish, not “quenched;” nor is “the bruised reed,” which seems beyond the hope of restoration “broken.”

But the completeness of our security is graphically portrayed—*Thou art my hiding-place*, to cover from danger—*my shield*,² also to protect me in it. Either I shall be kept *from* trouble, that it shall not come; or *in* trouble, that it shall not hurt me. The *hiding-place* alone would be imperfect security, as being limited to one place. But *my shield* is movable, wherever be the point of danger or assault. I can “quench the dart” that is aimed at my soul.

But a *hiding-place* implies also secrecy.³ And truly the believer’s is a “hidden life,”⁴ beyond the comprehension of the world. He mixes with them in the common intercourse of life. But while seen of man, he is dwelling “in the secret of the Lord’s tabernacle,”⁵ safe in the midst of surrounding danger, guarded by invincible strength.⁶ Often, indeed, must the world be surprised at his constancy, amidst all their varied efforts to shake his steadfastness. They know not “the secret of the Lord, which is with them that fear him.”⁷ And never could he have had a just conception of the all-sufficiency of his God, until he finds it above him, around him, underneath him, in all the fulness of everlasting love—*his hiding-place, and his shield*. Thus in the heart of the enemy’s country “he dwelleth on high, and his place of defence is the munitions of rocks.”⁸

But are we acquainted with this *hiding-place*? How have we discovered it? Are we found in it, and careful to abide in it? Within its walls “that wicked one toucheth us not.”⁹ Yet never shall we venture outside the walls unprotected, but his assault will give us some painful remembrance of our unwatchfulness. And then do we prize *our shield*, and run behind it for constant security. Remember, every other *hiding-place* “the waters will overflow.”¹⁰ Every other shield is a powerless defence. Surely then *the word*, which has discovered this security to us, is a firm warrant for our “hope.” And therefore every sinner, enclosed in the covert of love, will be ready to declare, “*I hope in thy word.*”

115. *Depart from me, ye evil-doers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.*

SAFE and quiet in his “*hiding-place*, and behind *his shield*,” David deprecates all attempts to disturb his peace, “*Depart from me, ye evil doers.*” He had found them to be opposed to his best interests; and he dreaded their influence in shaking his resolution for his God. Indeed such society must always hinder alike the enjoyment and the service of God. “Can two walk together, except

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 55, 57.

³ Psalm xxxi. 20.

⁶ Isa. ah xxvi. 1.

⁹ 1 John v. 18.

² Gen. xv. 1. Ps. iii. 3; v. 12. Comp. Eph. vi. 17.

⁴ Col. iii. 3.

⁷ Psalm xxv. 14.

¹⁰ Isaiah xxviii. 16, 17.

⁵ Ps. xxvii. 5.

⁸ Isaiah xxxiii. 16.

they be agreed?"¹ And can we be "agreed," and walk in fellowship with God, except we be at variance with the principles, the standard, and conduct of a world that is enmity against him?"² Not more needful was the exhortation to the first Christians than to ourselves, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation."³ True fellowship with God implies therefore a resolute separation from the ungodly. Secure in the "*hiding-place*," and covered with the "*shield*" of our covenant God, let us meet their malice, and resist their enticements, with the undaunted front of "a good soldier of Jesus Christ."⁴

Not that we would indulge morose or ascetic seclusion. We are expressly enjoined to courtesy and kindness;⁵ to that wise and considerate "walk towards them that are without,"⁶ which "adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour;"⁷ and indeed in some instances has been more powerful even than the word itself,⁸ to "win souls to Christ." But when they would tempt us to a devious or backsliding step—when our connection with them entices us to a single act of conformity to their standard, dishonorable to God, and inconsistent with our profession—then must we take a bold and unflinching stand, "*Depart from me, ye evil doers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.*"

This resolution gives no countenance to the self-delusive notion of maintaining an intimate connection with professed "*evil doers*" for the kind purpose of recommending our religion to their acceptance—a scheme, which requires a rare degree of caution and simplicity to attempt without entangling the conscience; and which, for the most part at least, it is to be feared, is only a specious covering for the indulgence of a worldly spirit. If the men of the world are to be met, and their society invited, for the accomplishment of this benevolent intention, let it be upon the principle of the Lord's command to his prophet, "*Let them return unto thee; but return not thou to them.*"⁹ The amiable desire to "please our neighbor" is limited to the single end, that it should be "*for his good to edification.*"¹⁰ And whenever this end and restriction has been overlooked, it is sufficiently evident that self-gratification has been the moving principle; and that the distinctive mark of the Christian character—bearing the cross, and confessing the name of our Divine Master—has been obscured.

Sometimes, however, in the struggle of conscience, an apprehension of danger is not altogether forgotten; and the question is asked, with some trembling of spirit, "*How far may I conform to the world, without endangering the loss of my religion?*" But, not to speak of the insincerity and self-deception of such a question, it would be better answered by substituting another in its place. "*How far may I be separate from the world, and yet be destitute of the vital principle?*" Scrutinize, in every advancing step to-

¹ Amos iii. 3.² Comp. Matt. vi. 21. James iv. 4.³ Acts ii. 40.⁴ 2 Tim. ii. 3.⁵ 1 Peter iii. 8.⁶ Col. ii. 5.⁷ Titus ii. 10.⁸ Comp. 1 Peter iii. 1.⁹ Jer. xv. 19.¹⁰ Comp. Rom. xv. 4.

ward the world, the workings of your own heart. Suspect its reasonings. Listen to the first awakened conviction of conscience. Though it be only a whisper, or a hint, it is probably the indication of the Divine will. And never forget, that this experiment of worldly conformity, often as it has been tried, has never answered the desired end. However this compromise may have *recommended ourselves*, no progress has been made *in recommending our Master*; since his name—whether from unwatchfulness or cowardice on our part, or from the overpowering flow of the world on the other side—has probably in such society scarcely passed over our lips with any refreshment or attentiveness. Indeed, so far from commending our religion by this accommodation, we have succeeded in ingratiating ourselves in their favor, only so far as we have been content to keep it out of sight; while at the same time, our yielding conformity to their taste, and habits, and conversation, has virtually sanctioned their erroneous standard of conduct; and tended to deceive them with the self-complacent conviction, that it approaches as near to the Scriptural elevation, as is absolutely required. The final result, therefore, of this attempt to conciliate the Gospel to those who “have no heart to it,” is—that now our own consciences have been ensnared, while they retain all their principles unaltered.

It must surely be obvious, that such a course is plainly opposed to the revealed declarations of Scripture, and bears the decisive character of unfaithfulness to our Great Master. We might also ask, whether our love to the Lord can be in fervent exercise, while we “love them that hate him?”¹—whether our hatred of sin can be active and powerful, while we can find pleasure in the society of those, whose life, “without God in the world,”² is an habitual wilful course of rebellion against him?³—whether we can have any deep and experimental sense of our own weakness, when thus venturing into temptation?—whether by unnecessary contact with the world, we can expect to “go upon hot coals,” and our “feet not be burned?”⁴—or, in fact, whether we are not forgetting the dictates of common prudence in forsaking the path of safety for a slippery, but more congenial, path? Is no harm to be anticipated from a wilful, self-pleasing association? Is it likely to be less dangerous to us than it was to an Apostle?⁵ or because we conceive ourselves to have more strength, shall we use less watchfulness, and show more presumption?

But, supposing Scripture not to determine the path of duty with infallible certainty; let this line of conduct be subjected to the impartial scrutiny of our own hearts, and of the effects, whether neutral or positively detrimental, which have resulted from it to ourselves, or to the Church. Have we not felt this fellowship with “*evil doers*” to be an hindrance in “*keeping the commandments*

¹ 2 Chron. xix. 2.

² Eph. ii. 12.

³ Who are the wicked, but those that forget God? Ps. ix. 17; x. 4.

⁴ Prov. vi. 28.

⁵ Matt. xxvi. 58, 69—75.

of our God?" If it has not always ended in open conformity to their maxims; or, if contrary to our apprehensions, it does not appear to sanction their principles, yet have we realized no deadening unfavorable influence? Has the spirit of prayer sustained no injury in this atmosphere? Have we never felt the danger of imbibing their taste, the spirit of their conversation and general conduct; which, without fixing any blot upon our external profession, must insensibly estrange our best affections from God? And have we never considered the injury of this worldly association to the Gospel in weakening by an apparent want of decision "on the Lord's side,"¹ the sacred cause which we are pledged to support; and obscuring the Scriptural character of the people of God as a distinct and separate people?² In a providential connection with *evil doers*, we go safely in the spirit of humility, watchfulness, and prayer; and this connection, felt to be a cross, is not likely to prove a snare.³ But does not union of spirit with them, to whom David says, with holy determination, "*depart from me*,"⁴—and to whom David's Lord will one day say, "*depart*"⁵—prove a want of fellowship with his spirit, and an essential unfitness for communion with the society of heaven? The children of this world can have no more real communion with the children of light, than darkness has with light.⁶ As great is the difference between the Christian and the world, as between heaven and hell—as between the sounds, "Come, ye blessed," and, "Depart, ye cursed."⁷ The difference, which at that solemn day will be made for eternity, must therefore be visibly made now. They must depart from us, or we from God. We cannot walk with them both. 'Defilement,' as Mr. Cecil remarks, 'is inseparable from the world.'⁸ We cannot hold communion with God, in the spirit of the world; and, therefore, separation from the world, or separation from God, is the alternative. Which way—which company—is most congenial to our taste? Fellowship will be a component part of our heavenly happiness.⁹ Shall we not then walk on earth with those with whom we hope to spend our eternity, that our removal hence may be a change of place only, not of company? May we have grace to listen to our Father's voice of love, "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord; and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, and will be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty!"¹⁰

116. Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope.

LEST the Psalmist should seem to have been self-confident in his rejection of the society of the ungodly, and determination to adhere to his God; here, as on former occasions,¹⁰ mindful of his

¹ Compare Exodus xxxii. 26. Judges v. 23. Matt. xii. 30.

² Compare Numb. xxiii. 9. John xvii. 16.

⁴ Matt. xxv. 41.

⁵ 2 Cor. vi. 14.

⁷ Cecil's Remains.

⁸ Heb. xii. 22—24.

³ Ps. cxx. 5, 6.

⁶ Matt. xxv. 34, 41.

⁹ 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

¹⁰ Verses 8, 31. The same frame is marked—Psalm xvii. 4, 5.

own weakness, he commits himself to the *upholding* grace of God. He does not content himself with commanding the *evil doer to depart*. He pleads for his God to come to him. He wants not only the hindrances to be removed, but the vouchsafement of present supporting grace. Such is our urgent continual view! Every circumstance has its temptation. Every change of condition is specially trying—and what is he in himself? unstable as water! Indeed the highest archangel before the throne stands only as he is upheld by the Lord, and may unite with the weakest child in the Lord's family in the acknowledgment, "By the grace of God I am what I am."¹ Much more, therefore, must I, pressed on every side with daily conflict and temptation, and conscious of my own weakness and liability to fall, "come to the throne of grace" for "grace to help in time of need."² My plea is the word of promise, "*according to thy word*"—"as thy days, so shall thy strength be."³ "Fear thou not," is the language of my upholding God—"for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee: yea, I will help thee: *yea, I will uphold thee* with the right hand of my righteousness."⁴ Blessed be the goodness that made the promise, and that guides the hand of my faith, as it were, to fasten upon it!

But why do I need the promise? why do I plead it? but "*that I may live*"—that I may know that life which is found and enjoyed "in the favor" of God?⁵ Nothing seems worth a serious thought beside; nothing else deserves the name. And therefore new life—"life more abundantly"⁶—let it be the burden of every prayer—the cry of every moment. Thus upheld by the Lord's grace, and living in his presence, I hope to feel the increasing support of my Christian hope. Though I have just before expressed it *in God's word*,—though I have "made my boast in the Lord," as "*my hiding-place and my shield*,"⁷ yet conscious helplessness leads me earnestly to pray, "*Let me not be ashamed of my hope.*"

Yes—Jesus is the sinner's hope—"the hope set before" his people, to which they "flee for the refuge" of their souls. And well may our "hope" in him be called "an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast."⁸ How does the distressed Church plead with *The hope of Israel*, and put her God in remembrance of this his own name,⁹ that she might *not be ashamed of her hope!* And how does she—with every member of her body—eventually learn by this pleading, to say in the confidence of faith, "*I know whom I have believed!*"¹⁰ And is there not a solid ground for this confidence? Is not the "stone that is laid in Zion for a foundation," a "tried stone?" Has

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 10. Compare 2 Peter ii. 4.

² Man's wisdom is to seek
His strength in God alone;
And e'en an angel would be weak,
Who trusted in his own.—*Cowper*.

² Heb. iv. 16.

⁵ Psalm xxx. 5.

⁸ Heb. vi. 18, 19.

³ Deut. xxxiii. 25.

⁶ John x. 10.

⁹ Jer. xiv. 6.

⁴ Isaiah xli. 10.

⁷ Verse 114.

¹⁰ 2 Tim. i. 12.

it not been tried by thousands and millions of sinners—nay, more, tried by God himself, and found to be “a sure foundation”¹ Yet still, that I may “hold fast the beginning of my confidence,” and “the rejoicing of my hope, firm unto the end,”² I must persevere in prayer, “*Uphold me according unto thy word.*”

David, when left to his own weakness, was “*ashamed of his hope*”—“I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes.”³ At another time, when upheld in a season of accumulated trial, “he encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”⁴ Thus I see “wherein my great strength lieth,” and how impotent I am when left to myself. What a mercy, that my salvation will never for a single moment be in my own keeping! what need have I to pray to be saved from myself! How delightful is the exercise of faith in going to the Strong for strength! The issue of my spiritual conflicts is certain. He who is the author will ever be the upholder, of the “hidden life” in his people. It is a part of his own life, and therefore can never perish. The tempter himself will flee, when he marks the poor, feeble, fainting soul, “*upheld according to the word of his God,*” and placed in safety beyond the reach of his malice.⁵ Not, however, that, as I once supposed, my weakness will ever be made strong; but that I shall daily grow more sensible of it, shall stay myself more simply upon infinite everlasting strength; and “most gladly shall I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”⁶

117. *Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.*

SUCH is my sense of need and peril, that my only refuge lies in “continuing instant in prayer.”⁷ I must send up one cry after another into my Father’s ear for the support of his *upholding* grace. For not only the consciousness of my weakness, but the danger of the slippery path before me, reminds me that the safety of every moment depends upon my *upholding* faithful God. The ways of temptation are so many and imperceptible—the influence of it so appalling—the entrance into it so deceitful, so specious, so insensible—my own weakness and unwatchfulness so unspeakable—that I can do nothing but go on my way, praying at every step, “*Hold thou me up and I shall be safe.*” Often indeed can I remember, when “my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped:”⁸ that I have been enabled to record, “Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.”⁹

How beautiful is the picture given of the Church of old, “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, *leaning upon her Beloved?*”¹⁰ This state of dependence was familiar to the Psalmist, and aptly delineates his affectionate, though conflicting confidence. “My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me.”¹¹

¹ Isa. xxviii. 16.

² Heb. iii. 6, 14.

³ Psalm xxi. 22.

⁴ 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

⁵ See 1 Peter i. 5.

⁶ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

⁷ Rom. xii. 12.

⁸ Ps. lxxiii. 2.

⁹ Ib. xciv. 18.

¹⁰ Cant. viii. 5.

¹¹ Psalm lxiii. 8.

The recollection of the care of his God, from his earliest life, supplied encouragement for his present faith, and matter for unceasing praise, "*By thee have I been holden up from the womb; thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee.*"¹ We cannot wonder, then, that this confidence should sustain his soul in the contemplation of the remaining steps of his pilgrimage, and his prospects for eternity. "Nevertheless," saith he, "I am continually with thee: *thou hast holden me by thy right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.*"² And indeed the more lively my spiritual apprehensions are, the more I shall realize the Lord by the operations of his grace as well as of his providence, "compassing my path and my lying down;"³ "lest any hurt me, keeping me night and day."⁴

It is inquired—how the Lord "*holds up*" his people in this slippery path? "Of the fulness of Jesus they all receive, and grace for grace;"⁵ so that "the life which they now live in the flesh, they live by the faith of the Son of God."⁶ And therefore if I am upheld, it is by the indwelling of the Spirit, who supplies from his infinite fountain of life all the strength and support I need throughout my dangerous way. By his Divine influence the dispensations of providence also become the appointed means of drawing and keeping me near to my God. If, therefore, prosperity is endangering my soul, and strengthening my worldly bonds, may I not trust to the ever-watchful kindness of the Lord, to keep me low, and not to suffer me to be at ease in my forgetfulness? If the pleasures of sense, if the esteem of the world, or the good report of the church, are bringing a bewitching snare upon my soul, my God will lead me into the pathway of the cross—in the 'valley of humiliation.'

Here, then, is the secret of an unsteady walk—the neglect of leaning upon an Almighty arm! How fearfully is the danger of self-confidence unveiled! Standing by my own strength, very soon shall I be made to feel, that I cannot stand at all. No "mountain" seemed to "stand stronger" than Solomon's: yet when he became the very "fool" that he describes—"trusting in his own heart"—how quickly was it moved!⁷

Peter thought in the foolishness of his heart, that he could have walked upon the water unsupported by the arm of his Lord: but a moment's sense of weakness and danger brought him to his right mind: "and, *beginning to sink, he cried, saying—Lord, save me.*"⁸ Well would it have been for him, if his deliverance at that moment of peril had effectually rebuked his presumption. We should not then have heard from the same lips that language of most unwarranted self-confidence:—"Although all shall be offended, yet will not I:—If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise."⁹ Poor deluded disciple! thou art on the brink of a grievous fall!¹⁰

¹ Ps. lxxi. 6.² Ib. lxxiii. 23, 24.³ Ib. cxxxix. 3.⁴ Isa. xxvii. 3.⁵ John i. 16.⁶ Gal. ii. 20.⁷ Comp. Psalm xxx. 6, 7. 1 Kings xi. 1—10.

Prov. xxviii. 26.

⁸ Matt. xiv. 28—30.⁹ Mark xiv. 29, 31.¹⁰ Prov. xvi. 18.

Yet was he "*held up*" from utterly sinking. "*I have prayed for thee,*" said the gracious Saviour, "*that thy faith fail not.*"¹ And thus "*held up*" by the same faithful intercession of my powerful friend (whose prayers are not weak as mine, "nor will he fail or be discouraged"² by my continual backslidings,) "*I*" too—though in the atmosphere of danger, in the slippery path of temptation, "*shall be safe*"—safe from an ensnaring world—safe from a treacherous heart—safe in life—safe in death—safe in eternity. Thus does an interest in the covenant encourage—not presumption—but faith, in all its exercises of humility, watchfulness, diligence, and prayer; and in this appointed way does the Lord securely "keep the feet of his saints."

Let me not, then, forget, either my continual liability to fall if left to myself, or the faithful engagements of my covenant God, to "keep me from falling." While I recollect for my comfort, that I "stand by faith," still is the exhortation most needful, "Be not high-minded, but fear."³ "By faith I stand," as it concerns God; by fear, as regards myself. As light is composed of neither brilliant nor sombre rays, but of the combination of both in simultaneous action, so is every Christian grace combined with its opposite, "that it may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." Hope, therefore, combined with fear, issues in that genuine, evangelical confidence, in which alone I can walk safely and closely with God. Let, then, the self-confident learn to distrust themselves, and the fearful be encouraged to trust their Saviour; and in each let the recollection of grace and help vouchsafed "in time of need," lead to the steadfast resolution, "*I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.*" However self-denying they may be in their requirements: however opposed in their tendency to "the desires of the flesh and of the mind," I take my God as the surety of my performance of them; and I desire to love them as the rule of my daily conduct, and as the very element of heavenly happiness to my soul.

118. *Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood.* 119. *Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies.*

THE Psalmist's determination to *keep the statutes of God* was strengthened by marking his judgment on those that *erred from* them. And thus the Lord expects us to learn at their cost.⁴ The cheerful, grateful *respect to his statutes* marks also a difference of character indicative of a difference of state. "His saints are in his hand, or sitting down at his feet;⁵ his enemies are *trodden down* under his feet" in full conquest,⁶ and disgraceful punishment.⁷ His own people he has exalted to be "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."⁸ Even now "he hath made them to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;" and shortly will they "be a crown

¹ Luke xxii. 31, 32.

² Isaiah xlii. 4.

³ Rom. xi. 20.

⁴ Ps. lviii. 10. Isa. xxvi. 9. Zeph. iii. 6, 7.

⁵ Deut. xxxiii. 3.

⁶ Ps. cx. 1. Comp. Josh. x. 24.

⁷ 2 Kings ix. 33. Mic. vii. 10. Mal. iv. 3.

⁸ Rom. viii. 17.

of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God;¹ while the ungodly “*are put away like dross*” from the precious gold. “Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.”² The same difference he makes even in chastening—upholding his own children under the scourging rod, lest they faint; but “*breaking the wicked with a rod of iron, and dashing them in pieces.*”³

This separation has been from the beginning; in his conduct to the two first children of men;⁴ and in his selection of Enoch,⁵ Noah,⁶ and Abraham⁷ from the world of the ungodly, “as vessels of honor meet for the Master’s use.”⁸ In after ages, he made Egypt “*know, that he put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.*”⁹ They were his own people, that should dwell alone, and not “*be reckoned among the nations*”¹⁰—a people, whom he had “*formed for himself, that they should show forth his praise.*”¹¹ And the same difference he has made ever since, between his people and the world—in their character¹²—their way¹³—their exercises of mind¹⁴—their services¹⁵—their privileges¹⁶—and their prospects.¹⁷ At the day of judgment the separation will be complete—final—everlasting. “*When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all his holy angels, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left; and these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.*”¹⁸

But mark the character—They “*err from God’s statutes*”—not in their minds, through ignorance; but “*in their hearts*”¹⁹ through obstinacy. They do not say, ‘Lord, we *know not*,’ but “*we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*”²⁰ It is not frailty, but unbelief; not want of knowledge, but love of sin—wilful, damnable. Justly, therefore, are they stamped as the “*wicked of the earth,*” and marked out as objects of the Lord’s eternal frown—expectants of “*the vengeance of eternal fire.*”

And is not this a solemn warning to those “*that forget God*”—that “*they shall be turned into hell*”²¹—to “*the proud*”—that in “*the day that shall burn as an oven, they shall be as stubble*”²²—to the worldly—that in some “*night*” of forgetfulness, their “*souls will be required of them*”²³—to the “*hypocrites in heart*”—that they “*are heaping up wrath?*”²⁴ Thus does the eye of faith discern through the apparent disorder of a world in ruins, the just, holy, and wise, government of God. “*Clouds and darkness are round*

¹ Eph. ii. 6. Isa. lxii. 3. Comp. Matt. xiii. 43.

² Jer. vi. 30.

³ Isa. lvii. 16–18, with Psalm ii. 9.

⁴ Gen. iv. 4, 5. Heb. xi. 4.

⁵ Gen. v. 22–24. Heb. xi. 5.

⁶ Ib. vii. 1.

⁷ Ib. xii. 1–3.

⁸ 2 Tim. ii. 21.

⁹ Exod. xi. 7.

¹⁰ Numb. xxiii. 9.

¹¹ Isa. xliii. 21.

¹² 1 John v. 19.

¹³ Prov. xv. 9.

¹⁴ Rom. vii. 5.

¹⁵ Prov. xv. 8.

¹⁶ Ib. iii. 32, 33.

¹⁷ Dan. xii. 2.

¹⁸ Matt. xxv. 31–33, 46. Comp. iii. 12; xiii. 30. Mal. iii. 16–18.

¹⁹ Ps. xcv. 10. Com. verse 21.

²⁰ Job xxi. 14.

²¹ Ps. ix. 17.

²² Mal. iv. 1.

²³ Luke xii. 19, 20.

Dan. v. 30.

²⁴ Job xxxvi. 13.

about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne."¹ If *the wicked* seem to triumph, and the righteous to be trodden down under their feet, it shall not be always so. "The end"² and "wages of sin is death."³ "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous."⁴

How awful, then, and almost desperate their condition! "*Their deceit is falsehood*;" "deceiving and being deceived"⁵—perhaps giving up to believe their own lie—perhaps one or another "blessing themselves in their own heart," saying "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my own heart, to add drunkenness to thirst."⁶ What then is our duty? Carnal selfishness says, 'Be quiet—let them alone'—that is, "Destroy them by our" indolence and unfaithfulness, "for whom Christ died."⁷ But what does Scripture, conscience, nay more—what does common humanity say? "Cry aloud, spare not."⁸ Awake the sleepers—sound the alarm, "Now is the accepted time—the day of salvation,"⁹ the moment to lift up the prayer and stretch forth the hand for plucking the brands out of the fire."¹⁰ "To-morrow the door may be shut, never to be opened more."¹¹

How awful the judgment of being "*put away like dross*!" Look at Saul,¹² when "*put away*"—going out, to harden himself in the sullen pride of despondency. Hear the fearful doom of Israel, "Son of man, the house of Israel is to me *become dross*; all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in *the midst* of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore saith the Lord God—Because ye are all become *dross*, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem, as they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin into the midst of the furnaces to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury; and I will leave you there, and melt you."¹³ But how should this justice of the Lord's proceedings endear *his statutes* to us! It is such a sensible demonstration of their truth, bringing with it such a close conviction of sovereign mercy to ourselves—not less guilty than they! Add to this—If he were less observant of sin—less strict in its punishment as a transgression of his word—we should lose that awful display of the holiness of the word, which commends it supremely to our love, "Thy word is *very pure*; therefore *thy servant loveth it*."¹⁴

120. *My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.*

THE justice of God is a tremendously awful subject of contemplation, even to those who are safely shielded from its terrors. The believer, in the act of witnessing its righteous stroke upon "*the wicked of the earth*," cannot forbear to cry out, "*My flesh trem-*

¹ Psalm xvii. 2.

⁴ Psalm i. 5.

⁷ Comp. Rom. xiv. 15.

¹⁰ Zech. iii. 2. Jude 23.

¹³ Ezek. xxii. 18—20.

² Rom. vi. 21.

⁵ 2 Tim. iii. 13.

⁸ Isa. lviii. 1.

¹¹ Matt. xxv. 10.

¹⁴ Verse 140.

³ Ib. 23.

⁶ Deut. xxix. 19.

⁹ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

¹² 1 Sam. xxviii. 5—25.

bleth for fear of thee."¹ Thus did the holy men of old tremble even with a frame approaching horror in the presence of the Divine judgments—David trembled at the stroke of Uzzah—as if it came very near to himself;² “*Destruction from God,*” saith holy Job, “*was a terror to me: and by reason of his highness I could not endure.*”³ Such also was the Prophet’s strong sensation, “*When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones.*”⁴ And thus, when God comes to “*tread down and put away*” his enemies for the display of the holiness of his character, and to excite the “*love*” of his people—those that stand by, secure under the covert of *their hiding-place*⁵—cannot but “*take up their parable and say—Alas! who shall live, when God doeth this!*”⁶ The children of God reverence their Father’s anger. They cannot see it (such is his “*terrible Majesty!*”⁷) without an awful fear; and this *trembling* at his judgments upon the ungodly covers them from the heavy stroke. Those that refuse to tremble shall be made to feel, while those that are “*afraid of his judgments*” shall be secure, “*Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, and see the reward of the wicked.*”⁸ “*I trembled in myself,*” said the Prophet, “*that I might rest in the day of trouble.*”⁹ Even the manifestations of his coming “*for the salvation of his people*” are attended with all the marks of the most fearful terror—as if his voice would shake the earth to its very foundation, “*Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven—the earth feared, and was still; when God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth.*”¹⁰

To mark this *trembling* as the character of the child of God, we need only contrast it with the ungodly scoffing, “*Where is the God of judgment? Where is the promise of his coming? The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.*”¹¹ Thus do men dare to “*run upon the thick bosses of his buckler,*”¹² instead of “*trembling for fear of him!*” This “*stoutness against the Lord,*”¹³ excites the astonishment of the hosts of heaven; so discordant is it to their notes of humble praise, “*Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name; for thy judgments are made manifest!*”¹⁴ Such is the special acceptance of this *trembling* spirit, that some shadow of it obtained a respite even for wicked Ahab,¹⁵ and a pardon for the penitent Ninevites;¹⁶ while its genuine “*tenderness of heart*” screened Josiah from the doom of his people,¹⁷ and will ever be regarded with the tokens of the favor of this terrible God. “*To this man,*” saith

¹ ‘A thrilling horror curdles my skin.’ The thing cannot be poetically expressed without periphrasis.—*Bishop Horsley.*

² 2 Sam. vi. 6—9.

³ Job xxxi. 23.

⁴ Hab. iii. 16. Comp. Jer. iv. 19. Dan. iv. 19.

⁵ Verse 114.

⁶ Numb. xxiv. 23.

⁷ Job xxxvii. 22.

⁸ Psalm xci. 8.

⁹ Hab. iii. 16.

¹⁰ Psalm lxxvi. 7—9. See the effect of a manifestation of the glory of the Saviour to the Evangelist for the purpose of special consolation and support. Rev. i. 17, 18. Compare also Daniel x. 8—17.

¹¹ Mal. ii. 17. ² Peter iii. 4. Zeph. i. 12.

¹² Job xv. 26.

¹³ Mal. iii. 13.

¹⁴ Rev. xv. 4.

¹⁵ 1 Kings xxi. 27—29.

¹⁶ Jonah iii. 5—10.

¹⁷ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27.

he, "I will look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that *trembleth at my word.*"¹

Believers in Christ! Rejoice in your deliverance from that "fear which hath torment."² Yet cherish that holy reverential fear of the character and judgments of God, which will form your most effectual safeguard "from presumptuous sins."³ The very supposition, that, if God had not engaged himself to you by an unchangeable covenant, his eternal *judgments* would have been your eternal portion, is of itself sufficient to mingle the wholesome ingredient of fear into the most established assurance. What! Can you look down into the burning bottomless gulf beneath your feet, without the recollection—If I were not immovably fastened to "the Rock of Ages" by the strong chain of everlasting love, there must have been my abode through the countless ages of eternity. If I had not been thus upheld by the grace, as well as by the providence, of God, I might have dropped out of his hand, as one and another not more rebellious than I have fallen, into this intolerable perdition? O God! "*my flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments.*"⁴

Thus the dread of the *judgments of God* is not necessarily of a slavish and tormenting character. "His saints are called to fear him;"⁵ and their fear, so far from "gendering unto bondage," is consistent with the strongest assurance;⁶ nay even, is its fruit and effect.⁷ It is at once the principle of present obedience,⁸ and of final perseverance.⁹ It is the confession of weakness, unworthiness, and sinfulness, laying us low before our God. It is our most valuable discipline. It is the "bit and bridle" that curbs the forwardness of the flesh, and enables us to "serve God acceptably," in the remembrance, that, though in love he is a reconciled Father, yet in holiness he is "a consuming fire."¹⁰

Now, if we are under the influence of this reverential awe and seriousness of spirit, we shall learn to attach a supreme authority and consideration to the least of his commands. We shall dread the thought of wilfully offending him. The fear of grieving him will be far more operative now, than was the fear of hell in our unconverted state. Those who presume upon their *Gospel* liberty, will not, probably, understand this language. But the humble believer well knows how intimately "the fear of the Lord" is connected with "the comfort of the Holy Ghost,"¹¹ and with his own steady progress in holiness, and preparation for heaven.

¹ Isaiah lxvi. 2, 5.

² 1 John iv. 18.

³ Psalm xix. 13.

⁴ How striking was H. Martin's experimental apprehensions of this subject! "In prayer in the evening I had such near and terrific views of *God's judgments* upon sinners in hell, that *my flesh trembled* for fear of them. The passages of God's holy word, that proved the certainty of hell torments, were brought to me in such a way as I never before felt. I flew trembling to Jesus Christ, as if the flame were taking hold of me! Oh! Christ will indeed save me, or else I perish."—*Journals*, vol. i. 382.

⁵ Psalm xxxiv. 9.

⁶ Comp. Hab. iii. 16, with 17, 18.

⁷ Heb. xii. 28.

⁸ Ib. xi. 7.

⁹ Ib. iv. 1.

¹⁰ Ib. xii. 29, with 28.

¹¹ Acts ix. 31. Compare Matt. xxviii. 8.

PART XVI.

121. *I have done judgment and justice; leave me not to mine oppressors.* 122. *Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me.*

THERE is something very solemn in the reflection, that God has set up a Vicegerent in the heart—an internal Judge, who takes cognizance of every thought, every emotion, every act—determining its character, and pronouncing its sentence. This tribunal tries every cause without respect to persons, time, place, or any circumstances, that might seem to separate it from other cases under the same jurisdiction. No criminal can escape detection from defect of evidence. No earthly power can hinder the immediate execution of the sentence. The sentence then, of this awful Judge, whether “accusing or excusing,”¹ is of infinite moment. The ignorant expression, “Thank God, I have a clear conscience!” is used alike by the self-righteous and the careless. The awakened sinner, however, pleads guilty to its accusations, and knows not how to answer them. Blessed be God for the revelation of his Gospel, which proclaims the blood of Jesus—sprinkling the conscience—silencing its charges—and setting before the sinner the way of peace! And now *through Jesus*, “the new and living way” of access to God, conscience, sitting on the throne—speaks peace and acceptance; and though sins of infirmity will remain, defiling every thought, desire and act, yet, like the motes on the face of the sun in the clearest day, they have little or no influence to obstruct the shining of the cheerful light upon the heart.²

The clearing of conscience is however connected with Christian integrity. “*If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.*”³ This “testimony of conscience” has often been “the rejoicing”⁴ of the Lord’s people, when suffering under unmerited reproach or “*proud oppression.*” They have been enabled to plead it without offence in the presence of their holy heart-searching God⁵—nay, even when in the near prospect of the great and final account, they might have been supposed to shrink from the strict and unerring scrutiny of their Omniscient Judge.⁶

But observe the influence of this testimony upon our spiritual comfort. David was at this time under persecution—no new trial to a child of God,⁷ and one that will never cease, so long as Satan has instruments at his command. But see the blessings which conscious uprightness gave to his prayers, “*I have done judgment and justice; leave me not to mine oppressors.*” Can my heart and conscience respond to this appeal? Then may I plead my

¹ Rom. ii. 15.

² See Heb. x. 19—22.

³ 1 John iii. 21.

⁴ 2 Cor. i. 12.

⁵ Samuel—1 Sam. xii. 3—5. Nehemiah—xiii. 14, 22. Job—x. 7. David—Psalm vii. 3—7; xviii. 20—24; xxvi. 1—6. Paul—Rom. ix. 1; and the Apostles—1 Thess. ii. 10.

⁶ Isa. xxxviii. 1—3.

⁷ 1 Peter iv. 12.

² Tim. iii. 12.

cause before God, "*Leave me not to my oppressors. Let not the proud oppress me.*" Plead my cause with them. Let my righteousness be made known. Let it be seen, that thou "wilt not leave me in their hand, nor condemn me when I am judged. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me: for I wait on thee."¹ But if any deviation from the exact rule of righteousness between man and man² has been allowed—if the world charge me as ungodly, because they have proved me unrighteous—then let me not wonder, that "the consolations of God shall be small with me;"³ nor let me expect a return of the Lord's cheering manifestations, until the Achan has been removed from the camp,⁴ and by confession to God,⁵ and reparation to man,⁶ I have "given glory to the Lord God of Israel."

But let not this appeal be thought to savor of Pharisaical pride. He pleads not merit. He only asserts his innocence—the righteousness of his cause—not of his person. Though upright before man, he ever felt himself a sinner before God. The highest tone of conscious integrity is therefore consistent with the deepest prostration of evangelical humility. The difference is infinite between the proud Pharisee and the upright believer. The Pharisee makes the appeal with undisturbed self-complacency and self-righteous pleading. The believer would ever accompany it with the Publican's prayer for mercy.⁷ Instantly—in a deep conviction of need—he appends the supplication, "*Be surety for thy servant for good.*"⁸ The keen eye of the world may possibly not be able to affix any blot upon my outward profession; but, "if thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities; O Lord, who shall stand?"⁹ The debt is continually accumulating, and the prospect of payment as distant as ever. I might well expect to be "*left to my oppressors,*" until I should pay all that was due¹⁰ unto my Lord. But behold! "Where is the fury of the oppressor?"¹¹ The surety is found—the debt is paid—the ransom is accepted—the sinner is free. There was a voice heard in heaven, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."¹² Yes, the Son of God himself became "surety for a stranger," and "smarted for it."¹³ At an infinite cost—the cost of his own precious blood—he delivered me from "*mine oppressors*"—sin—Satan—the world—death—hell. "It was exacted; and he answered."¹⁴ As Judah in the place of Benjamin, he was ready to stand in my stead before his Father. "I will be surety for him: of mine hand shalt thou require him."¹⁵ As Paul in the stead of Onesimus, he was ready to plead, before the same tribunal, "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I will repay it."¹⁶

¹ Ps. xxxvii. 33; xxv. 21.² Matt. vii. 12.³ Job xv. 11.

Comp. Ps. lxxvi. 18.

⁴ Josh. vii. 10—15.⁵ Ib. 19.⁶ Luke xix. 8.⁷ Ib. xviii. 9—13.⁸ Comp. Psalm xxvi. 11. Neh. xiii. 22, with 14—a bold testimony of integrity presented in the character of a sinner.⁹ Psalm cxxx. 3.¹⁰ Matt. xviii. 34.¹¹ Isaiah li. 13.¹² Job. xxxiii. 24.¹³ Prov. xi. 15.¹⁴ Isa. liii. 7. Bishop Lowth.¹⁵ Gen. xliii. 9.¹⁶ Philemon 18, 19.

Let this subject be ever present to my mind. Well indeed was it for me, that Jesus did not "hate suretyship."¹ Had he refused the vast undertaking, how could I have answered before the bar of God? Or had he undertaken only for those that loved him, again should I have been left without a plea. But when as my *surety* he has brought me under his yoke, and made me his "*servant*," I can plead with acceptance before his throne, "*Be surety for thy servant for good*"²—for the good which thou knowest me to need—my present and eternal deliverance from my proud oppressors. And do not I need such a surety every moment? And need I be told how fully he has performed the Surety's part? "So that I may boldly say," "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died. It is Christ that lives. There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."³

123. *Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.*

AND do thine "*eyes*," tried believer, begin to "*fail*?" So did thy Redeemer's before Thee. He, whom thou hast been recollecting as *thy Surety*, when he stood in thy place burdened with the intolerable load of thy sin—bearing the weighty strokes of Infinite justice upon his soul—he too was constrained to cry out, "Mine eyes fail, while I wait for my God."⁴ Listen, then, to thy deserted Saviour counselling his deserted people; "gifted with the tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to you that are weary"—Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."⁵

That *our Surety* will plead *for our good*, doubt not. Yet "the vision is for an appointed time."⁶ But shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?"⁷ *Salvation*—a gift of such comprehensive and enduring blessing—is it not worth the waiting trial? Wonderful is that arrangement by which the word of grace is made *the word of righteousness!* God hath bound himself to us by his promises of grace which are not—yea and nay, but "yea and amen"⁸—under his own hand and seal. Who that has tried them, but will "set to his seal that God is true?"⁹ Cheering indeed is the thought, that, amidst the incessant changes in Christian experience, our hope is unchangeably fixed. We may not indeed always enjoy it; but our salvation does not depend upon our present enjoyment of its consolation. Is not the blessing as certain—yea—is not *our assurance*

¹ See Prov. xi. 15, last clause.

² Compare Isaiah xxxviii. 14, where the same word is used in the original. "*Be surety*," "*Undertake for me*." The same plea is urged. "*Let not the proud oppress me*." "*O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake*." The same frame of conflict is marked, "*Mine eyes fail for thy salvation*," verse 123. "*Mine eyes fail with looking upward*."

³ Rom. viii. 33, 34, 1.

⁴ Psalm lxix. 3. Comp. xxii. 1—3.

⁵ Isaiah l. 4, 10.

⁶ Hab. ii. 3.

⁷ Luke xviii. 7, 8.

⁸ 2 Cor. i. 20.

⁹ Josh. xxiii. 12. Psalm cxi. 12, with John iii. 33.

of an interest in it as clear, when we are brought to the dust under a sense of sin, as if we were "caught up into the third heaven" in a vision of glory?

In a season of desertion, therefore, while we maintain a godly jealousy over our own hearts, let us beware of a mistrustful jealousy of God. Distrust will not cure our wound, or quicken us to prayer, or recommend us to the favor of God, or prepare us for the mercy of the Gospel. Complaining is not humility. Prayer without waiting is not faith. The path is plain as noonday. Continue to believe as you can. Wait on the Lord. This is the act of faith, depending on him—the act of hope, looking for him—the act of patience, waiting his time—the act of submission, resigned, even if he should not come. Like thy Saviour, in his "agony" of desertion, "pray more earnestly."¹ Condemn thyself for the sins of which thou art asking forgiveness. Bless him for his past mercy, even if thou shouldest never taste it again. Can he frown thee from his presence? Can he belie his promise to his waiting people?² Impossible! Nay! while he has taken away the sensible apprehensions of his love, and in its room kindled longing desires for the lost blessing; is not this to show himself—if he be "verily a God that *hideth himself*"—yet still "*the God of Israel, the Saviour?*"³ Though he delays his promise, and holds us as it were in suspense; yet he would have us know, that he has not forgotten "*the word of his righteousness.*" But this is his wise and effectual mode of trying his own gift of faith. And it is this "*trial of faith*"—and *not faith untried*—that will be "found to praise, and honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."⁴

The full consolation of the Gospel is therefore the fruit of patient, humble waiting for the Lord, and of earnest desire, conflicting with impatience and unbelief, and at length issuing in a state of child-like submission and dependence. The man who was here expressing his longing expectation for God's salvation, was evidently, though unconsciously, in possession of the promise. Nor would he at this moment have exchanged his hope, clouded as it was to his own view, for all "the pleasures of sin," or the riches of the world. Although at this moment he appeared to be under the partial hidings of his Father's countenance, yet it is important to observe, that he was not satisfied, as an indolent professor, to "lie upon his face"⁵ in this sad condition. His "*eyes failed with looking upward*"—stretched up with earnest expectation to catch the first rising rays of the beaming Sun of Righteousness. He knew, what all Christians know, who walk closely with God, that his perseverance in waiting upon God would issue in the eventual fulfilment of every desire of his heart.⁶

¹ Luke xxii. 44.

² Isaiah xxx. 18; xlix. 33.

³ Isaiah xlv. 15.

⁴ 1 Peter i. 7.

⁵ Joshua vii. 10.

⁶ Fox tells us of Mr. Robert Glover, martyr at Coventry, two or three days before his death, overwhelmed with the prospect of martyrdom, and mentioning to a friend his earnest supplication for the light of God's countenance, yet without any sense of comfort. His darkness continued up to the period of his arriving within sight of the stake, when

But can we assuredly plead "*the word of his righteousness*" for the anticipation of the object of our desire? Have we always an express promise answering to our expectations, "putting God in remembrance"¹ of his word? Possibly we may have been asking not "according to his will,"² and therefore may have "charged God foolishly,"³ as if he had been unfaithful to his word, when no engagement had been pledged: when we had no warrant to build upon from "*the word of his righteousness.*" If, however, our petition should be found to be agreeable to his word of promise, and faith and patience hold on in submission to his will, we must not, we cannot, suppose, that one tittle that we have asked will fail. Whether the Lord deliver us or not, prayer and waiting will not be lost. It is a blessed posture for him to find us in, such as will not fail to insure his acceptance, even though our request should be denied. An enlivening view of the Saviour is in reserve for us; and "*the word of righteousness*" will yet speak, "This is the rest, wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing."⁴ To every passing doubt and rising fear, oppose this *word of his righteousness.*

But let me bring my own heart to the test. Am I longing for the manifestation of God? Surely if I am content with what I already know, I know very little of the unsearchable depths of the love of Christ; and I have abundant need to pray for more enlarged desires, and a more tender enjoyment of his Divine presence. If faith is not dead, yet it may have lost its conquering and quickening vigor. Let me then exercise my soul in diligent, careful, patient waiting upon God, equally removed from sloth and frowardness—and I shall yet find the truth of that consoling "*word of his righteousness,*" "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."⁵

124. Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.

125. I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.

A SENSE of *mercy*, and the privilege of divine *teaching*, were the earnest of the Lord's "*salvation*" for which "*the eyes of his servant were failing,*" and for which he was waiting in dependence upon the sure "*word of his righteousness.*" And indeed these two wants daily press upon every "*servant*" of God as matter for earnest supplication. Both are intimately connected. A deeper sense of *mercy* will bind us more strongly to his *statutes*; ⁶ while a more spiritual *teaching in the statutes* will humble us in a sense of sin, and consequent need of *mercy.*⁷ As it respects the first—if

suddenly his whole soul was so filled with consolation that he could not forbear clapping his hands and crying out, 'He is come—he is come.' He appeared to go up to heaven in a chariot of fire, exhibiting little or no sensibility of his cruel death. Was not this the "*word of his righteousness*" to one whose "*eyes failed in looking for it?*"—Fox's *Acts and Monuments*, 1555.

¹ Isaiah xliii. 26.

² 1 John v. 14. James iv. 3.

³ Job i. 22.

⁴ Isaiah xxviii. 12; also xxx. 15.

⁵ Psalm xevii. 11. The same plea under similar circumstances of conflict is urged, Psalm cxliii. 1.

⁶ 1b. cxvi. 12—14.

⁷ Jer. xxxi. 19.

there is a sinner upon the earth, who needs the special *mercy of God*, it is his own "*servant*." For as the Lord sees abundantly more excellence in his feeblest desire, than in the professor's most splendid external duties; so he sees far more sinfulness and provocation in the workings of his sin, than in the palpably defective services of professors, or in the open transgression of "*the wicked of the earth*." Let him scrutinize his motives, thoughts, and affections, even in his moments of nearest and happiest approach unto his God; and he will find such defilement cleaving to every offering, with all the aggravations of mercy, light and knowledge, vouchsafed, that the confession of his soul, when comparing himself with his fellow-sinners, will be "Of whom I am chief."¹ And therefore, as a "*servant of God*," I can only come before him upon the ground of "*mercy*." For my best performances I need an immeasurable world of mercy—pardoning—saving—everlasting mercy; and yet by the blood of Jesus I dare to plead, "*Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy*."

But then I am ignorant as well as guilty; and yet I dare not pray for *teaching*—much and hourly as I need it—until I have afresh obtained mercy. These two blessings lead me at once to the foundations of the Gospel—in the work of Christ, and the work of the Spirit—*mercy* flowing from the blood of the Son²—*teaching* from the office of the Spirit.³ "*Mercy*" is the first blessing, not only in point of importance, but in point of order. I must know the Lord as a Saviour, before I can go to him with any confidence to be my teacher. But when once I have found acceptance for my petition, "*Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy*"—my way will be opened to enlarge my petition—yea, once and again to repeat it, "*Teach me thy statutes. Give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies*"—that I may know with intelligent conviction, walk, yea, "run in the way of thy commandments"⁴ with an enlarged heart. For let me never forget, that I am "redeemed from the curse" only—not from the "service of the law"⁵—yea, redeemed from its curse, that I may be bound to its service.⁶ And does not my especial relation to my God as his *servant*, furnish me with a plea for his acceptance?⁷ For when this "earth is full of his mercy"⁸—much more may I, as belonging to his house, plead for the special mercy of his *teaching*⁹—his own covenant promise¹⁰—so needful for his *servant*, who desires to know, that he may do, his will."⁹

But if I am *the Lord's servant*, how did I become so? Time was (let me be ashamed and confounded at the remembrance of it) when I was engaged for another master, and another service.¹⁰ But his sovereign grace called me from the dominion of sin—from the chains of Satan—from the bondage of the world, and drew me

¹ 1 Tim. i. 15.² Eph. i. 7.³ John xiv. 26; xvi. 13.⁴ Verse 32.⁵ Gal. ii. 19. Luke i. 74, 75.⁶ Verse 91. Ps. cxliii. 12.⁷ Verse 64.⁸ Heb. viii. 10.⁹ Verses 33, 34; lxxxvi. 11; cxliii. 8, 10.¹⁰ Rom. vi. 16, 20.

Titus iii. 3.

to himself. "His I am—and him I serve."¹ His service is my highest privilege: his reward of grace is my glorious hope. "If any man serve me," saith my Master, "let him follow me: and where I am, there shall also my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my Father honor."² As his servant, therefore, I cast myself with confidence upon his mercy, and expect to be "dealt with according to that mercy." Nay—I shall be denied nothing that I "ask according to his will." For he has condescended to call me—not "his servant," but "his friend"³—yea more, to call himself "my brother."⁴

Lord! thou hast shown me this great favor and grace to make me "thy servant." I would be thine forever. I love thy service too well to wish to change it; yet must I mourn over my dulness, my backwardness in doing thy will, and walking in thy way. Oh! "teach me thy statutes" more clearly, more experimentally! "Give me understanding" to discern their heavenly sweetness and their holy liberty, that I may live in a more simple and devoted obedience to them, until I come to see thy face, and to be "thy servant" in thy heavenly temple, "no more to go out."⁵

126. *It is time for thee, Lord, to work; for they have made void thy law.*

IF I desire a more spiritual *understanding* of the revelation of God, how can I but mourn to witness its awful neglect and contempt? It seems as if the ungodly not only sin against it, but would drive it out of the world.⁶ *They make it void*—denying its power to rule, to annul its power to punish. Oh! let us cherish that distinguishing feature of the Lord's people, "sighing and crying for all the abominations of the land,"⁷—that we cannot hear or see the name of God dishonored, without feeling as for our Father's wounded reputation.⁸ Can we suffer the world quietly to go on

¹ Acts xxvii. 23. ² John xii. 26. ³ Ib. xv. 15. ⁴ Ib. xx. 17. Heb. ii. 11, 12.

⁵ Rev. vii. 15; iii. 12. The Annals of the Reformation furnish a beautiful record of George of Anhalt—a godly young prince, of twelve years old. 'He put up constant and fervent prayer to God, beseeching him to bring his heart under the power of the truth; and often, in the privacy of his cabinet, he exclaimed, with tears—*Dealt with thy servant according to thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.* His prayers were answered. Under strong conviction, and constrained to action upon it, he fearlessly ranged himself on the side of the Gospel.'—*D'Aubigné's History of the Reformation*, Book v. ch. vi.

⁶ Exodus v. 2. Psalm xii. 4.

⁷ Ezekiel ix. 4.

⁸ What a Christian ought to feel under these circumstances, let us learn from the following extract of the diary of the saintly Martyn. Upon hearing at Shiraz, in the course of his disputations, some reproach of his Saviour's name, he writes thus:—"I was cut to the soul by this blasphemy. In prayer I could think of nothing else but that great day, when the Son of God should come in the clouds of heaven, "taking vengeance on them that know not God," and convince men of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against him." (We might almost think that this verse was upon his mind at this moment.) 'Mirza Seid Ali perceived that I was considerably disordered, and was sorry for having repeated the verse, but asked what it was that was so offensive. I told him, that I could not endure existence if Jesus were not glorified; that it would be hell to me if he were to be always thus dishonored. He was astonished, and again asked the reason why. 'If any one pluck out your eyes,' I replied, 'there is no saying why you feel pain. It is feeling. It is because I am one with Christ, that I am thus dreadfully wounded.' On his again apologizing, I told him, 'that I rejoiced at what had happened, inasmuch as it made me feel nearer the Lord than ever.' *It is when the head or heart is struck, that every member feels its membership.*'—*Martyn's Life*, p. 420, 8vo edition.

their course? Must we not throw in our weight of influence, whatever it may be, to stem the flowing torrent: and when (as, alas! is too often the case) all efforts are unavailing, carry the cause to the Lord, "It is time *for thee*, Lord, to work?" This deprecation does not contradict the law of love which requires us to love, pray for, and to bless our enemies;¹ for the Lord's people are not angry for their own cause, but for His. David had no regard to his own honor, but to God's law. He had not injured his enemies. He had labored to "overcome their evil with good."² He had often wept for their sins,³ and prayed for their conversion.⁴ But all was in vain. 'Now, Lord, take the rod into thine own hand, "It is time *for thee*, Lord, to work."⁵ This was true zeal—zeal of the Spirit, not of the flesh. How gracious is our God in permitting his servants thus to plead with him, and, as it were, to give him no rest, until⁶ "he shall arise," and *work*, and sit upon the throne of the kingdoms of the earth!

But why does he not break out with some overpowering manifestation of his power? They are "his sword and rod" for the chastening of his people,⁶ to discipline their watchfulness into constant exercise.⁷ They are the trial of their faith—believing the Lord's justice against apparent inconsistency,⁸ and of their patience "waiting the set time of deliverance."⁹ Thus they become a profitable ministry for the Church—and this valuable end accomplished, God works his own work upon them,¹⁰ and "will avenge his own elect speedily."¹¹

Meanwhile—waiting for this "little while," let us "live by faith."¹² Let us be found on the Lord's side—laboring for sinners—pleading with their hardness and rebellion in our Master's name, and for our Master's sake. Let all the weight of personal exertion and influence, consistent example, and wrestling supplication, be concentrated in "coming to the help of the Lord against the mighty."¹³ Let us see to it, that, if we cannot do what we would, we do what we can.¹⁴ And if at last overborne by the torrent of ungodliness, we shall find our refuge and rest in pleading with our Lord for the honor of his name—"Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name."¹⁵ "My Spirit shall not always strive with man."¹⁶ Often, when He has seen "*it time for him to work*," have his judgments made the earth to tremble. "Sodom and Gomorrah" have "known the power of his anger, and are "set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."¹⁷ And when his "*time to work*" is fully come, what is all the resistance of earth and hell, but as "setting the briers and thorns against him in battle?" "*I would*" saith he, "*go through them. I would burn them to-*

¹ Matt. v. 44.⁴ Ps. lxxxiii. 16.⁷ Ps. lix. 11.¹⁰ Isaiah x. 12.¹³ Judges v. 23.¹⁶ Gen. vi. 3.² Ps. xxxv. 11—14.⁵ Isaiah lxii. 7.⁸ Ib. lxxxiii. 16—18.¹¹ Luke xviii. 8.¹⁴ Mark xiv. 8.¹⁷ Jude 7.³ Verses 136, 153.⁶ Ps. xvii. 13, 14. Isa. x. 5, 6.⁹ Rev. xiii. 10.¹² Heb. x. 37, 38.¹⁵ Ps. lxxiv. 78; also 10, 11, 22.

gether.¹” A word—a frown—a look—is destruction. “He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength. Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?”² Or “who hath resisted his will?”³

But what shall we say of that stupendous work of his hand, by which—when men “*had made void his law*”—when no restrictions could bind, no forbearance win them—when he “saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor, *therefore his arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness, it sustained him?*”⁴ Surely, if we could conceive the hosts of heaven to have taken up this expression of ardent concern for the glory of God, “*It is time for thee, Lord, to work*”—they could little have thought of such a *work* as this—they could never have conceived to themselves such an unlooked-for, combined display of power, justice, and mercy. To set at nought then this *work*—is it not to refuse all hope—all remedy? To persist in “*making void the law*” after so magnificent an exhibition of Almighty *working*—must it not expose the transgressors to reap the fruit of their own obstinacy, and to prepare to meet him as their Judge, whom they refuse to receive as their Saviour? Nor must they wonder, if the Lord’s people, with a holy indignation against sin, and fervent zeal for his glory, should appeal to his faithfulness for the fulfilment of his judgments, “*It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law.*”

127. *Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.*

Therefore I love thy commandments. Yes—shall they not have double valuation in mine eyes, for the scorn and reproach which the world cast upon them? They count them dross—*I love them above gold—yea, above fine gold.* This hope, confidence, and idol of the worldling,⁵ the love of which has been the ruin of thousands,⁶ —is not the *commandment* of God more to be desired than it?⁷ “The merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. It is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto it.”⁸ Here has the Lord unlocked to us his golden treasure, and enriched our souls with “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

This image brings the miser before us. His heart and treasure are in his gold. With what delight he counts it! with what watchfulness he keeps it! hiding it in safe custody, lest he should be despoiled of that which is dearer to him than life. Such should Christians be: spiritual misers: counting their treasure, which is “*above fine gold,*” and “*hiding it in their heart,*”⁹ in safe keeping,

¹ Isaiah xxvii. 4.

² Job ix. 4.

³ Rom. ix. 19.

⁴ Isa. lix. 16.

⁵ Job xxxi. 21.

⁶ 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

⁷ Psalm xix. 10.

⁸ Prov. iii. 14, 15.

⁹ Verse 11. Augustine tells us of himself, that while a Manichee, he slighted the Scripture for the plainness of its style, which appeared to him (from a false standard of criticism) not to be compared with the dignity of Ciceronian eloquence. (Visa mihi est indigna scriptura quam Tullianæ dignitati compararem. Confess. lib. iii. cap. 5.) But after his blessed acquaintance with Christ, though Tully was still read with pleasure, yet this thing alone, said he, abated his former interest—that the name of Christ was not there. Lib. iii. 4.

where the great despoiler shall not be able to reach it. Oh, Christians! how much more is your portion to you than the miser's treasure! Hide it; watch it; retain it. You need not be afraid of covetousness in spiritual things: rather "covet earnestly"¹ to increase your store: and by living upon it, and living in it, it will grow richer in extent, and more precious in value.

But have I through Divine grace been enabled to withdraw my love from the unworthy objects, which once possessed it; and to fix it on that which alone offers satisfaction? Let me attempt to give a reason to myself of the high estimation in which I hold it as infinitely transcending those things which the world ventures their all—even their temporal happiness—to obtain. "*Therefore I love the commandments of God above gold: yea, above fine gold*"—because, while the world, and my own heart have only combined to flatter me, *they* have discovered to me my real state, as a self-deceived,² guilty,³ defiled⁴ sinner before God: because they have been as a "schoolmaster to bring me to Christ"⁵—the only remedy for sin, the only rest for my soul. "*I love them;*" because they have often supplied wholesome reproofs in my wanderings; and plain directions in my perplexity. "*I love them:*" because they restrict me from that which would prove my certain ruin; and because in the way of obedience to them, the Lord has "accepted me with my sweet savor."⁶ Should I not "*love them?*" Can "*gold, yea, fine gold,*" offer to me blessings such as these? Can it heal my broken heart? Can it give relief to my wounded spirit? Has it any peace or prospect of comfort for me on my death-bed? And what cannot—what has not—what will not—the precious word of God do at that awful season of trial? O my God, I would be deeply ashamed, that "*I love thy commandments*" so coldly—that they are so little influential upon my conduct—that they so often give place to objects of comparative nothingness in thy sight. O that my heart might be wholly and habitually exercised in them, that I may find the "work of righteousness, quietness, and assurance forever?"⁷

128. *Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.*

THE general contempt of religion acts upon the Christian's judgment no less than upon his affections. Is wickedness breaking loose, to *make void the law*? *Therefore he esteems it to be right.* His judgment—instead of being shaken—is more determined. How beautiful is it to see the heaven of grace pervading the whole man! In the fervor of his heart he "*loves the commandments even above fine gold;*" but yet his "love will abound yet more and more *in knowledge and in all judgment.*"⁸ His is an intelligent and universal regard to them—"esteeming all the precepts concerning all things to be right." This constitutes his separate and exclu-

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 31.

² Rom. vii. 9.

³ James ii. 10.

⁴ Rom. vii. 14.

⁵ Gal. iii. 24.

⁶ Ezek. xx. 41. Comp. Isa. lxiv. 5.

⁷ Isa. xxxii. 17.

⁸ Phil. i. 9.

sive character. He is readily known from the thoughtless worldling. But his difference from the professor, though really as marked in the sight of God, is far less perceptible to general observation. Consisting more in the state of heart, than in any external mark of distinction, it is often only within the ken of that eye, whose sovereign prerogative it is to "search the heart,"¹ and to "weigh the spirits."²

Many profess to "*esteem the precepts to be right*," so far as they inculcate the practice of those moral virtues, of which they may present some faint exhibition, and demand the abandonment of those sins, from the external influence of which they may have been delivered. But when they begin to observe the "exceeding breadth of the commandment"³—how it takes cognizance of the heart, and enforces the renunciation of the world, the crucifixion of sin, and the entire surrender of the heart unto God; this searching touchstone separates them from the Church, and exposes to open day the brand of hypocrisy upon their foreheads. "Herod did *many things*."⁴ And so the enemy still will allow a partial subjection to the *precepts*. But—as he well knows—one sin holds us his captive as well as a thousand. The wilful contempt of one *precept* is the virtual rejection of all. *All*, therefore—*not many*—is the Christian's word. He fails in some—yea, in all—but all are the objects of his supreme regard—every duty, and every circumstance and obligation of duty⁵—the evangelical as well as the moral *precepts*—teaching him to renounce himself in every part (his sins as a source of pleasure, and his duties as a ground of dependence): and to believe in the Son of God as the only ground of hope.⁶ He never complains of the strictness of the *precepts*; but he is continually humbled in the recollection of his nonconformity to them. "*Every way*," however pleasing to the flesh, that is opposed to the revealed will of God, is "*hated*," as "*false*" in itself, and "*false*" to his God. This "godly sincerity" will apply to every part of the Christian Directory. So that any plea for the indulgence of sin (as if it admitted of palliation, or was compensated by some surplus duty, or allowed only for some temporary purpose) or any wilful shrinking from the *universality* of obedience—blots out all pretensions to uprightness of heart. If heliness be *really loved*, it will be loved for its own sake; and *equally loved and followed in every part*.⁷ By this entire "approval of things that are excellent," we shall "be sincere and without offence unto the day of Christ."⁸

O my soul, canst thou abide this close test? Hast thou as much regard to the precepts, as to the privileges of the Gospel? Is no precept evaded, from repugnance to the cross that is entailed to it? Is no secret lust retained? Art thou content to let all go? If my hatred of sin is sincere, I shall hate it more in my own house than abroad; I shall hate it most of all in my own heart. Here lies the

¹ Jer. xvii. 10.

⁴ Mark vi. 20.

⁷ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

² Prov. xvi. 2.

⁵ Luke i. 6.

⁶ Phil. i. 10.

³ Verse 96.

⁶ 1 John iii. 23. John vi. 29.

grand seat of hypocrisy. And therefore may the great Searcher of hearts enable me to search into its depths! May I take the lamp of the Lord to penetrate into its dark interior hiding-places of evil! May I often put the question to my conscience, 'What does the Omniscient "Observer of men" know of my heart?' Perhaps at the time that the Church hold my name in esteem, the voice of conscience, as the voice of God, may whisper to me, "That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God." Some false way, yet undetected within, may keep me lifeless and unfruitful in the midst of the quickening means of grace. Let me look into my house—my calling—my family—my soul; and in the course of this search how much matter will be found for prayer, contrition, renewed determination of heart, and dependence upon my God! "*O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! I will keep thy statutes; O forsake me not utterly.*"² And oh! let my spirit be wounded by every fresh discovery of sin. Let my soul bleed under it. But *especially and instantly* let me apply to the "fountain opened for sin and uncleanness." Here let me wash my soul from the guilt of sin, and regain my peace with God. And to him, who opened this fountain, let me also repair for a large supply of spiritual strength. May his power and grace sharpen my weapons for the spiritual conflict, until every secret iniquity is overcome, and forever dispossessed from my heart!

And just as sin—besides its guilt—brings its own misery; so does this whole-hearted purity carry with it its own happiness. Can I forget the time when, under Divine grace and teaching, I made a full presentment of myself³—when I began to estimate myself as a hallowed, devoted thing—sacred—set apart for God? Was not this the first sunshine of my happiness? Nor was this offering made with momentary excitement, notional intelligence, forced acquiescence, or heartless assent. My judgment accorded with the choice of my heart. All was right in *his precepts*. All that was contrary to them was abominable. And will not this form the essence of the happiness of heaven, where every aspiration—every motion—every pulse of the glorified soul—in the eternity of life—will bear testimony to the holiness of the service of God?⁴

PART XVII.

129. *Thy testimonies are wonderful; therefore doth my soul keep them.*

CAN the professor make this acknowledgment? He knows only the letter—the shell, which excites no interest. Yet hidden from his eye is an unsearchable depth, which will make the believer a

¹ Luke xvi. 15.

² Verses 5, 8.

³ See Rom. xii. 1.

⁴ Rev. xv. 3.

learner to the end of his life. Even he, who "was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter,"¹ was brought to this adoring contemplation. "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"² Every way indeed is this revelation worthy of him, the first letter of whose name is "Wonderful."³ It lays open to the heaven-taught soul, what "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man."⁴ Think of the Creator of the world becoming a creature—yea, "a curse for"⁵ man. Think of man—guilty and condemned—made just with God by a righteousness not his own.⁶ Think of God bringing out of the ruinous fall more glory to himself, and more happiness to man, than from his former innocence—in the display of his mercy—the glory of his justice, and the investment of sinners—not, as before, with a creature's righteousness, security, and reward, but with his own righteousness,⁷ guardianship,⁸ and glory.⁹ Think how "the way into the holiest of all is" thus "made manifest."¹⁰ Think how abounding grace is the death as well as the pardon of sin¹¹—the present as well as the everlasting life of the soul.¹² These are among the stupendous discoveries of the sacred book, that bow the humble and reflecting mind to the confession, "*Thy testimonies are wonderful!*" Let us therefore join with the Apostle, in "bowing our knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"—that we "might be able to comprehend *with all saints*" (for, blessed be God! the privilege is common to all his people) "what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the" unsearchable "love of Christ,"¹³ "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."¹⁴

And how delightful is the recollection of these "testimonies" being our "*heritage forever!*"¹⁵ For they are not less "*wonderful*" in their practical fulness, than in their deep unfathomable mysteries of love. Such is the infinite enlargement of this "heritage," that he, who foreknew every thought that would find an entrance into the minds of his people, has here secretly laid up seasonable direction and encouragement for every, even the most minute, occasion and circumstance of need. Here again is wrapped up, in words fitted by wisdom to receive the revelation, all that intercourse between God and man, throughout all ages of the Church, which is treasured up in the vast unsearchable depository of the Divine mind and purpose. Can we then forbear repeating the exclamation, "*Thy testimonies are wonderful?*"

But it is not enough to 'adore the fulness of Scripture':¹⁶ We must seek to imbibe and exhibit its practical influence. Holy

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 4.² Rom. xi. 33.³ Isa. ix. 6.⁴ 1 Cor. ii. 9.⁵ John i. 1—3, 14, with Gal. iii. 13. Phil. ii. 6—8.⁶ Rom. iii. 19—22.⁷ Jer. xxiii. 6. 1 Cor. i. 30.⁸ John vi. 39; x. 28. Col. iii. 3, 4.⁹ John xvii. 21—24. Rev. iii. 21.¹⁰ Heb. ix. 8, with x. 19, 20.¹¹ Rom. v. 20, with vi. 1—6.¹² John iv. 14; vi. 57; xiv. 6, 19.¹³ Eph. iii. 14, 18, 19.¹⁴ Col. ii. 3.¹⁵ Verse 111.¹⁶ 'Adoro plenitudinem Scripturarum,' was the exclamation of Tertullian—'in which

admiration of the "*testimonies*" will kindle spiritual devotedness to them, "*Therefore doth my soul keep them.*" The stamp of Divine authority upon them, while it deepens our reverence, commands our steady and cheerful obedience. To keep them is our privilege, no less than our obligation; and in this path we shall delight to persevere to the end.

But how affecting is the thought of the mass, who look at these wonders with a careless or unmeaning eye, unconscious of their interesting import! They pass by the door of the treasury, hardly condescending to look aside into it: or only taking a transient glance, which comprehends nothing of its inexhaustible stores. "*I have written to them,*" saith the Lord, "*the great things of my law: but they are counted as a strange thing.*" But far more wonderful is it, that we, enlightened, in answer to prayer,² with "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation"³—should often be so indifferent to the mysteries of redeeming love here unfolded before us, and should experience so little of their practical influence! Oh! let the recollection of our indolence, and want of conformity to them, never cease to humble us. Let us not enter into *the testimonies* as a dry task, or an ordinary study; but let us concentrate our minds, our faith, humility, and prayer, in a more devoted contemplation of them. Every such exercise will extend our view of those parts, with which we had conceived ourselves to have been competently acquainted: opening a new field of wonders on every side, far beyond our present contracted apprehensions.⁴

And can any joy be imagined so sublime as the adoring contemplation of this revelation? It reflects even to angels a new and

posture of holy admiration,' said the deeply learned and pious Dr. Owen, 'I desire my mind may be found while I am in this world.'

¹ What do I not owe to the Lord for permitting me to take a part in the translation of his word? Never did I see such wonders, and wisdom, and love, in the blessed book, as since I have been obliged to study every expression; and it is a delightful reflection, that death cannot deprive us of the pleasure of studying its mysteries.'—*Martyr's Life*, p. 271. The same testimony was given by a kindred spirit employed in the same work. Shortly before his death, Dr. Buchanan, giving to a friend some details of his laborious revisions of his Syriac Testament, suddenly stopped and burst into tears. On recovering himself, he said, 'I am not ill, but I was completely overcome with the recollection of the delight which I had enjoyed in this exercise. At first I was disposed to shrink from the task as irksome, and apprehended that I should find even the Scriptures fail by the frequency of this critical examination. But so far from it, every fresh perusal seemed to throw fresh light on the word of God, and to convey additional joy and consolation to my mind.' 'How delightful,' observes his biographer, 'is the contemplation of a servant of Christ thus devoutly engaged in his heavenly Master's work, almost to the very moment of his transition to the Divine source of light and truth itself!'

¹ Hosea viii. 12.

² See verse 18.

³ Eph. i. 17, 18.

⁴ Augustine found this so experimentally true, that he tells us, 'that though he should with better capacity and greater diligence study all his life-time, from the beginning of his childhood to decrepit age, nothing else but the Holy Scriptures; yet they are so compacted and thickly set with truths, that he might daily learn something which before he knew not.'—*Aug. Epis.* To this truth the late venerable Antistes Hess set his seal at the age of eighty-six, when he informed a young missionary to the Jews, that 'for seventy years the word of God had been the daily object of his unremitting researches; and that still he discovered in it new traces of the mysterious love and wisdom of God.'—*Jewish Expositor*, Nov. 1825.

glorious manifestation of their God.¹ It engages their every faculty with intense admiration and delight.² And while they behold and worship with self-abasement, their obedience is lively. "With twain he" (the seraphim before the throne) "covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly."³ Thus may we study the same lessons, and with the same spirit! May our contemplation humble us in the dust, and animate us in the service of our God! "*Thy testimonies are wonderful; therefore doth my soul keep them.*"

130. *The entrance⁴ of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple.*

'So "*Wonderful are thy testimonies,*" gracious God, that even by touching as it were only their threshold, "*the entrance of thy words giveth light and understanding unto*" my heart. The study commenced in simplicity and prayer, opens an "*entrance*" to the first dawning "*light*" of the word into the soul; often only sufficient to make darkness visible, but still "*shining more and more unto the perfect day.*"⁵ Indeed all the spiritual light known in this dark world has flowed from the word, forcing its "*entrance,*" like the beams of the sun, upon the opening eyes of "*a man that was born blind.*" It is a most striking instance of Divine condescension, that this word—so "*wonderful*" in its high and heavenly mysteries—should yet open a path so plain, that the most unlearned may find and walk in it.⁶ Indeed *the entrance of the word* into unintellectual and uncultivated minds, often gives an enlargement and elevation of thought which is the earnest of the restoration of man to his original glory, when doubtless every mental as well as spiritual faculty was "*filled with all the fulness of God.*"⁷ So astonishing is the power of this heavenly light, that from any one page of this holy book, a child or even an idiot, under heavenly teaching, may draw more instruction than the most acute philosopher could ever obtain from any other fountain of light! Nay—he may acquire a more intelligent perception of its contents, than the student, untaught by the Spirit of God, who may have devoted to its study the persevering industry of many successive years. For very possible is it to be possessed of all the treasures of literature, and yet to remain in total ignorance of everything that is most important for a sinner to know.⁸ The Apostle's paradox unfolds the secret, "*If any man among you seemeth to be*

¹ Eph. iii. 10.

² See 1 Pet. i. 12.

³ Isa. vi. 2.

⁴ "Opening."—Ainsworth.

⁵ Prov. iv. 18.

⁶ Isaiah xxxv. 8.

⁷ Eph. iii. 19.

Comp. Col. iii. 10.

⁸ "A very extraordinary thing," said one, "if I, who have read the Bible over and over in the original languages, have studied it day and night, and have written criticism and comments on it—a very extraordinary thing that I should not be able to understand that meaning in the Scriptures, which is said to be so plain, that a "wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err" in the discovering of it.' And so it is extraordinary, until we open the Bible; and there we see the fact explained. The man who approaches the word of God in his own wisdom, shall not find what the "fool" will discover under the teaching of Divine wisdom. "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent;" and "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise."—Cecil's Remains.

wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."¹ We do not mean to disparage human wisdom; but it is the *pride of wisdom*, so opposed to the simplicity of the Gospel, which prevents us from "sitting at the feet of Jesus, and hearing his word." It makes the teacher instruct in "the words of man's wisdom," rather than in the knowledge of "Christ and him crucified;"² and hinders the learner from receiving Christ in the light and love of the truth.

It is painful to remember how much light may be shining around us on every side, without finding an "*entrance*" into the heart. "The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."³ Not only the pride of human reason, but the love of sin, shuts out the light, "*Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.*"⁴ And thus because "the eye is evil, the whole body is full of darkness;" and "if the light that is in them is darkness, how great is that darkness!"⁵ Most awful is the view given us of the conflict between the contending powers of light and darkness—"The god of this world blinding the eyes of them that believe not, *lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*"—the Almighty God resisting his hateful influence, and shining into the hearts "of his people, *to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*"⁶ How necessary is it to watch vigilantly against the pride that "rebels against the light,"⁷ and the indifference that neglects to cherish it! How much more "*entrance*" would have been given to the word, and consequently how much clearer would have been the *diffusion* of light in the soul, were we as earnest and diligent in secret prayer for heavenly teaching, as we are accustomed to be in the public hearing of the word!

But the enthusiast is not satisfied with the light of the word. The delusion of his own heart dreams of a light within—an immediate revelation of the Spirit, independent of the word. It cannot however be safe to separate the light of the Spirit from the light of the word. The word indeed moves in subserviency to the Spirit; but the light of the Spirit is nowhere promised separate from the word. If it does not always guide directly by the word; yet it is only manifested in the direction of the word. The word is in the matter, if not in the mode; and, though the Spirit may by immediate light direct us to any path of duty, yet it is invariably to that path, which had been previously marked by the light of the word. Thus the Spirit and the word conjointly become our guide—the Spirit enlightening and quickening the word—and the word evidencing the light of the Spirit. Nor will their combined influence ever leave the church of God, until she has joyfully and completely entered into Immanuel's land, where she shall need no

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 18.² Compare Ib. ii. 1—4.³ John i. 5, "apprehended it not."—Scott. "Admitted it not."—Campbell.⁴ John iii. 19, 20.⁵ Matt. vi. 23.⁶ Comp. 2 Cor. 4—6.⁷ Job xxiv. 13.

other light, than that of the glory of God, and of the Lamb, which shall shine in her forever.¹

But—Reader—rest not satisfied with whatever measure of light may have been hitherto vouchsafed. Seek that the word may have “an entrance ministered unto you *abundantly*.” The most advanced believer is most ready to acknowledge, how much of the word yet remains unexplored before him.² Cultivate the disposition of simplicity—the spirit of a “little child”³—willing to receive, embrace, submit to, whatever the revelation of God may produce before you. There will be many things that we do not understand; but there is nothing that we shall not believe. “Thus saith the Lord—” is sufficient to satisfy reverential faith. To this spirit the promise of heavenly light is exclusively made, “The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise *the simple*. The meek will he guide in judgment; *the meek* will he teach his way.”⁴ It is beautiful to see a man, like Solomon, endued with enlarged powers of mind⁵—acknowledging himself to be a little child;⁶ afraid of trusting in his own light; and seeking instruction from above. But never will a proud unhumiliated mind know the benefit of this Divine instruction. To such a student, the Bible must ever be a dark book; since it is its very design to destroy that disposition which he brings to the inquiry. That knowledge, therefore, which is unable to direct our way to heaven—nay, which by closing the avenues of spiritual light, obstructs our entrance thither, is far more a curse than a blessing. Far more glorious is the simplicity of the word than the wisdom of the world.

“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said; I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.”⁷

131. *I opened my mouth, and panted; for I longed for thy commandments.*

WHEN the “wonderful” character of God’s “testimonies” is apprehended; and when their “entrance has given light to the soul:” something far beyond ordinary affection and desire is excited. A thirsty man—burning with inward heat on a sultry day, and “opening his mouth, and panting” for some alleviation of his thirst—is a fine image of the child of God intensely longing for the attainment of his object. Or, if we suppose before us the man nearly exhausted by the heat of his race, and “opening his mouth, and panting” to take in fresh breath to renew his course; so would the believer “rejoice,” like the sun, to “run his heavenward race.”⁸ He cannot satisfy himself in his desires. The motions of his soul to his God are his life and his joy. It is a spring of perpetual motion beating within—perpetual because natural—not a

¹ See Rev. xxi. 23.

² Matt. xviii. 3.

³ Luke x. 21.

⁴ See the testimonies cited in the notes on the preceding verse.

⁵ Ps. xix. 7; xxv. 9.

⁶ 1 Kings iv. 29—34.

⁷ 1b. iii. 7.

⁸ Ps. xix. 5. For another illustration, see Job xxix. 23.

rapture, but a habit—a principle, having indeed its faintings, and its sickness, but still returning to its original spring of life and vigor. It seems as if the soul could never draw in enough of the influences of the spiritual life. Its longings are insatiable—as if the heart would “break with”¹ the overpowering strength of its own desires, until at length wearied with the conflict, the believer “opens his mouth, and pants” to fetch in a fresh supply of invigorating grace. He enjoys “a little reviving”² in his Lord’s commandments; enjoying the Lord himself as his well-spring of refreshment.³

Hear the man of God elsewhere giving, or rather attempting to give, expression to his “*pantings*.” “As the heart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. I stretch forth my hands unto thee; my soul thirsteth after thee as a thirsty land.”⁴ Thus did Job “*open his mouth, and pant*.” “O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even unto his seat!”⁵ And the church—pouring out her heart before the Lord, “With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.”⁶ St. Paul also describes the same intenseness of his own desire, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”⁷ But amidst all these examples, and *infinitely beyond them all*—behold the ardor of our blessed Master in his work. Such was the “*panting*” of his heavenly desire, that, when “wearied with his journey,” and “sitting at Jacob’s well,” he forgot even his natural want for his thirsty frame, in the joyous conversion of a lost sinner to himself.⁸

And thus must our affections be fully engaged.⁹ The soul must be kept open to heavenly influence; so that, when the Lord touches us with conviction, inclines our hearts to himself, and constrains us to his service, we may be ready to “exercise ourselves unto godliness,”¹⁰ in receiving, cherishing, and improving the heavenly “*longing after his commandments*,” and may “*open our mouths, and pant*” for more advanced progress in them. We look not so much to the quantity, as to the activity of faith; always at work, stirring up a holy fire within, for the utmost stretch of human attainment; like men of large projects and high determinations, still

¹ Verse 20.

² Ezra ix. 8.

³ See on verse 20.

⁴ Ps. xlii. 1; lxiii. 1; cxliii. 6.

⁵ Job xxiii. 3.

⁶ Isaiah xxvi. 9.

⁷ Phil. iii. 12–14.

⁸ John iv. 6, 31–34.

⁹ ‘Be always displeased with what thou art, if thou desirest to attain to what thou art not; for where thou hast pleased thyself, there thou abidest. But if thou sayest, ‘I have enough,’ thou perishest. Always add—always walk—always proceed. Neither stand still, nor go back, nor deviate.’—Augustine.

¹⁰ 1 Tim. iv. 7.

aspiring to know more of God, both in the enjoyment of his love, and in conformity to his will. And shall we be ashamed of these feelings? Shall we not rather be deeply humbled, that we know so little of them—encouraged, if we have any springing of them—alarmed, if we be utterly destitute of their influence? Shall we not be “*opening our mouth, and panting*,” when any new path of service is opened before us? For if we are content to be strangers to this “*longing*” after God—this readiness for duty; what else can be expected, but “*sliding back from the Lord by a perpetual backsliding*?”¹ Growing in sin, declining in love, and gradually relinquishing the habit of prayer, we shall shortly find little attaching to us but the empty name—*Christianity without Christ*. The world will despise these exercises as enthusiasm, the distemper of a misguided imagination. But is it—can it be—otherwise than a “*reasonable service*,”² as well as a bounden obligation, to give up our whole desires to him, who is alone worthy of them? There can be no evidence of their sincerity, unless they are supreme.

But let union with Christ, and the life flowing from him, be the constant spring of this holy ardor. Thus shall I enjoy a more habitual influence of his love—that all-constraining principle, which overcomes all my complaints of coolness and deadness of heart, and fills me with *panting and longing* in his service. But am I ready to shrink from this elevated standard? If my heart is drawing back, let me force it on. Let me lay my command, or rather God’s command upon it. Let conscience do its office, until my heart is brought into actual and close contact with this touchstone of my spiritual prosperity. What then—let me ask myself—is the pulse of my desires after spiritual things? What exercises of grace do I find in them? What improvement of grace do I derive from them? Do I *pant*, thirst, long, after the enjoyment of heavenly pleasure? Do I mourn over, and conflict with that indolence and indifference, which so often hinders my race? Oh! let me be found a frequent suppliant at the throne of grace; bemoaning my dulness, yet “*stirring up*” my faith “*to lay hold on*”³ my God; seeking for larger views of the Gospel, a warmer experience of its promises, a more intense appetite for its enjoyments, and a more devoted attachment to its service. Surely such desires will issue in the confidence of faith. “*My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness.*”⁴

132. *Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.*

THE highest ardency of holy desire is no ground of satisfaction before God. Nor does the believer in his most elevated moments forget his proper character—always a sinner—needing mercy every moment—in every duty. His prayer for mercy therefore suitably follows his exalted expression of love, “*Look thou upon me, and*

¹ Jer. viii. 5.

² Rom. xii. 1.

³ Isaiah lxiv. 7.

⁴ Psalm lxiii. 5.

be merciful unto me." Mercy is indeed secured to him beyond the powers of earth and hell to despoil him of it; but the comfortable sense of this mercy is vouchsafed only according to the earnestness of his desires, and the simplicity of his faith. And this is indeed a blessing, with which no earthly source of satisfaction can compare.¹ What are all the riches of the world without it, but splendid poverty, as little able to supply the place of Jesus in the soul, as the magnificent array of the starry firmament is to compensate for the absence of the sun? It is night with the child of God—Egyptian night—"darkness which may be felt,"² until his Sun appear to chase away his gloom—until his Lord hear his cry, "*Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me.*"

To have this portion of "*those that love the name*" of God, is, then, the grand object. To have our offering, as Abel's was,³ accepted with God—to walk as Enoch walked,⁴ with God—to commune with him as Abraham⁵ and Moses⁶ were privileged to do—to be conformed with the holy Apostle⁷ to the death of Christ—in a word, to be interested in all the purchase of a Saviour's blood—"this is the heritage of the Lord's servants," this is the "one thing that we have desired of the Lord, and are seeking after,"⁸—"this," with the dying Psalmist, "is all our salvation, and all our desire."⁹ "Remember me then, O Lord, with the favor that thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen; that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation; that I may glory with thine inheritance."¹⁰

And yet, alas! how often has the power and deceitfulness of sin cast us into so lifeless a state, that we are not only living without the enjoyment of this portion, but at rest without it; scarcely knowing or caring whether the Lord look on us or not! Can we wonder, that our holy, jealous God, should "hide himself,"¹¹ and "go, and return to his place?"¹² His next manifestation will probably be in the way of sharp conviction, making us to feel our distance, our coldness, our barrenness; awakening us to search into the cause; and, in the contrast of our sad condition with those who are walking in his favor, again bringing forth the cry, "*Look thou unto me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.*" The prayer of humility, earnestness and perseverance, though it may be tried awhile, will surely never be forgotten.¹³ If therefore we cannot yet "sing in the ways of the Lord,"¹⁴ yet let us not cease to mourn after him, till he *look upon us*, and "satisfy us with his mercy."¹⁵ And oh! let us remember, that there is but one way, through which one gracious look, or one expression of tender mercy, can visit our souls. Let our eyes and heart then be ever fixed on Jesus. It is only in this his "beloved" Son that the Lord can *look upon us*, so as not to

¹ Psalm iv. 6, 7.² Exod. x. 21.³ Gen. iv. 4.⁴ Ib. v. 24.⁵ Ib. xviii. 17—33.⁶ Exod. xxxiii. 11. Deut. xxxiv. 10.⁷ Phil. iii. 10. Gal. ii. 20.⁸ Psalm xxvii. 4.⁹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.¹⁰ Psalm cvi. 4, 5.¹¹ Isaiah lvii. 17.¹² Hosea v. 15.¹³ Comp. Isa. xxx. 18. Hab. ii. 3.¹⁴ Ps. cxxxviii. 5.¹⁵ Ib. xc. 14.

“behold iniquity in us.” But we “are complete in Him.”¹ Here then let us wait; and when this our prayer has received its answer in the Lord’s best time—whether it be in “the goings of our God in the sanctuary,”² or in the more secret manifestations³ of his love—now then, Christians, “arise, and shine.”⁴ Let it be known, that you have been on the mount with God, by the lustre of your face, the adorning of your profession, before the world.

Lord! since our looks to thee are often so slight, so cold, so distant, that no impression is made upon our hearts; do thou condescend continually to look upon us with mercy and with power. Vouchsafe us such a look, as may touch us with tenderness and contrition, in the remembrance of that sin, unbelief, and disobedience, which pierced the hands, the feet, the heart of our dearest Lord and Saviour.⁵ Oh! for that contrite spirit, in which we shall enjoy the *look* of thy special favor!⁶ Oh! for a glimpse of thy love, that will put our spiritual enemies to shame!⁷ Oh! for that sunshine of thy countenance, which brings present salvation to our souls!⁸

133. *Order⁹ my steps in thy word; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*

To expect the favor of the Lord without an habitual desire of conformity to his image, is one among the many delusions of a self-deceiving heart. It is the peculiar character of the Christian, that his desires are as earnest for deliverance from the power as from the guilt of sin. Having therefore prayed for acceptance, he now cries for holiness. For even could we conceive the Lord “*to look upon him*” with a sense of his favor, he would still feel himself a miserable creature, until he had received an answer to his prayer, “*Let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*”

But it is often difficult to distinguish the power of temptation from the prevalence of sin, and thus precisely to ascertain, when “*iniquity*” may be said to “*have dominion over us.*” Is it not, however, the influence of temptation—not acting upon the mind, but admitted with consent into the heart? It is this actual consent of the will, obtained by the deceitfulness and solicitations of sin, that marks its real “*dominion.*” Light, knowledge, and conscience, may open the path of holiness; but while the will—the sovereign power in the soul—dissents, the reigning power of sin continues undisputed. Much care, however, much singleness, and a most jealous scrutiny of the springs of action, are required, accurately to determine the bias of the will, and consequently the “*dominion of iniquity.*” The perplexed conflicting soul may mistake *the rebellion* for the “*dominion of iniquity*”—its continued impression upon the heart for its ruling sway. On the other hand, a constrained opposition of conviction may present some hopeful symptoms of deliverance, while the dominant principle is

¹ Comp. Numb. xxiii. 21. Eph. i. 6. Col. ii. 10.

² Psalm lxviii. 24.

³ Matt. vi. 6. John xiv. 21—23.

⁴ Isaiah lx. 1.

⁵ Comp. Luke xxiii. 61.

⁶ Isaiah lxvi. 2.

⁷ Psalm lxxvii. 17.

⁸ Ib. lxxx. 19.

⁹ ‘Set straight my steps.’—LXX. ‘Firmly direct.’—Ainsworth.

still unshaken. The present resolution to any particular act of sin may be weakened, while the love and habit of it remains unaffected. Sin is not always hated, when it is condemned, or even forsaken: nor are duties always loved in the act of their performance. The opposition to sin, which the awakened superficial professor considers as his evidence of uprightness of heart, is often only the unavailing resistance of a natural enlightened conscience to the ruling principle of the heart. The light and power of conscience may do much in condemning every known sin, and in restraining from many; in illustrating every known duty, and insisting upon the external performance of many; while yet the full "*dominion of iniquity*" is undisturbed. Were not Ahab and Judas as completely under this "*dominion*" after their repentance as they were before? Did not Balaam, with all his knowledge—and the young ruler, with all his natural loveliness and semblance of sincerity—"lack that one thing"—a heart delivered from the "*dominion of its own iniquity*?"² Yet it is not occasional surprisals, resisted workings, abhorred lusts, nor immediate injections of evil and blasphemous thoughts; *but only the ascendancy of sin in the affections* that proves its reigning power. The throne can admit but of one ruler; and therefore, though grace and *iniquity* may and do co-exist within, they cannot be co-partners in one sovereignty. Yet forget not that every sinful indulgence is *for the moment* putting the sceptre into the hands of our worst enemies. The setting up of an usurper is the virtual dethronement of the rightful sovereign. The subjection to sin is therefore the rejection of Christ.

How inestimably precious is the thought, that deliverance from this cursed *dominion* is inseparably connected with a state of acceptance with God! The man who enjoys the unspeakable blessing of pardoned iniquity, is he "in whose spirit there is no guile."³ He has a work done within him, as well as for him. His Saviour is a *whole* Christ—"made of God unto him Sanctification and" complete "Redemption," as well as "Righteousness."⁴ He comes to the cleansing fountain,⁵ as the double cure of his *iniquity*—equally effectual to wash from its power as from its guilt.

But let us duly estimate the value of David's preservation. He had been used to "hide *the word* in his heart," as his safeguard against sin,⁶ and from his own experience of its power he had recommended it to the especial attention of the young.⁷ Yet the recollection of his continual forgetfulness and conscious weakness, leads him to turn his rule into a matter of prayer—*Order my steps in thy word*—implying, that if his *steps* were not *ordered*, from want of their keeping, *iniquity* would regain its *dominion*. And who of us have not daily need of this ruling discipline? Without it, all is disorder. Our scattered affections need to be "united" in

¹ 1 Kings xxi. 27; xxii. Matt. xxvii. 3—5.

³ Psalm xxxii. 1, 2.

⁴ 1 Cor. i. 30.

² 2 Peter ii. 15. Mark x. 21, 22.

⁶ 1 Cor. xv. 56.

⁷ Verse 9.

⁵ Zech. xiii. 1.

one central principle,¹ under the direction of *the word*. The universal influence of this rule also is so important. The word not only cheers our path, but *orders our steps*.²—Every act—every duty—are as *steps* in the heavenward path—guarding us from the devious paths on either side, beset with imperceptible danger, and spread with the fowler's snare. And what a blessed path would this be for us, if we had singleness and simplicity always to "look right on, and straight before us!"³ But alas! we are often only half roused from our security. The word is forgotten; or there is an unreadiness to receive its Divine impressions. Our own wisdom is consulted: and, "or ever we are aware," "*iniquity*" regains a temporary "*dominion over us*."

Now I would ask myself—What do I know of this godly, careful walk? Am I frequently during the day looking upward to my heavenly guide; and then looking into his word as my direction in the way; and lastly, considering my heart and conduct, whether it is "*ordered in the word*?" The man, who has "the law of God in his heart," alone possesses the security, that "none of his steps shall slide."⁴ When I take therefore a step into the world, let me ask—Is it "*ordered in God's word*," which exhibits Christ as my perfect example; so that, walking after him, and following in his steps, I may be able to frame my temper and habits according to this unsullied pattern?

But let us mark, how fully is this prayer warranted by the special promise of the Gospel, "*Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace*."⁵ The law stirred up sin, and gave it increased power; while it left us to our unassisted exertions to subdue it. We watch, pray, and strive against it: yet, alas! it mocks our efforts—rages, yea, tyrannizes more than ever.⁶ But it is the cross of Calvary, that gave the child of God his first right view of sin, that first made him loathe it, that first enabled him to contemplate a holy God without fear, and even with confidence.—This—this alone subdues his pride, rebellion, enmity, selfishness. In him that hung there, we trust as an Almighty conqueror; and we are made ourselves "more than conquerors through him that loved us."⁷ His very name of Jesus⁸ marks his office, his crown, his glory. Here therefore—not in doubts and fears—not in indolent mourning for sin—here lies, the appointed means of present relief—the only hope of final victory. "*Iniquity*" even when subdued, will struggle to the last for "*dominion*:" but looking to and living on Jesus, we have the victory still. The more clear our view of Jesus the more complete is our victory. Supplies of continual strength will ever be vouchsafed to restrain the "*dominion of iniquity*," and even to "keep under" its daily risings; except as they may be needful for the exercise of our graces, and be eventually overruled for the glory and praise of our faithful God.

¹ Psalm lxxvi. 11.

² Verse 105; xvii. 4; xix. 11. Prov. vi. 23.

³ Prov. iv. 25.

⁴ Psalm xxxvii. 31.

⁵ Rom. vi. 14, with 12.

⁶ Ib. vii. 8. 1 Cor. xx. 16.

⁷ Rom. viii. 37.

⁸ Matt. i. 21.

134. *Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.*

“MANY are the afflictions of the righteous,”¹ from external as well as from internal enemies—not only from their own “*iniquity*,” but “*from the oppression of man*.” Yet “man is only the Lord’s hand and sword,”² and he can only move under the overruling guidance of our Father’s wisdom and love. Not indeed that the believer would (except in submission to the will of God)³ desire his “*deliverance*” from this trouble on account of personal pain and distress; but he sometimes finds peculiar circumstances of trial an unavoidable hindrance in the service of his God. And his conviction sends him to the throne of grace: and there he never makes interest in vain. “*He cries unto the Lord because of the oppressors: and he sends a Saviour, and a great one: and he delivers him.*”⁴

The power of faith is indeed Omnipotent. Mountains are removed from their place, or they become “plains before”⁵ it; “or the worm” is enabled to “thresh them, and beat them small, and make them as chaff.”⁶ Often is the Christian strengthened to overcome the most formidable opposition, and to “profess a good profession before many witnesses,”⁷ who are “watching for his halting.”⁸ The grace of Christ will make the hardest duty easy! and the love of Christ will make the sharpest trials sweet: yet, where in the continued exercise of faith the obstacles to conscientious service remain unmoved, (as, for instance, a child of God restrained in the fetters of a worldly family from a free and avowed obedience,) we may lawfully pray, that the providence of God would *deliver from the oppression of man, that we might keep his precepts.*

A time of *deliverance*, as well as a time of persecution, has proved a season of extraordinary prosperity in the church of God. When “the Churches *had rest* throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria,” they “*were edified*; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, *were multiplied.*”⁹ And thus in individual experience, whatever be the benefit of persecution, yet the weariness of a long protracted conflict is often more than flesh and blood can bear; and which he who “knoweth our frame,”¹⁰ will not refuse to look upon, and remove, in answer to the prayers of his afflicted people.¹¹ At the same time, our proneness to self-indulgence, and our natural inclination to shrink from discipline—as needful as our food—require this prayer to be presented with exceeding caution and self-jealousy. There is great danger, lest, in our eagerness to escape from the difficulties of our path, we should lose the important benefit intended by them. We must therefore accompany the petition for deliverance with a sincere purpose to “*keep God’s precepts.*”¹² For how many have ex-

¹ Psalm xxxiv. 19.

² Ib. xvii. 13, 14.

³ See the example of David, 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26; and of David’s Lord, Luke xxii. 42.

⁴ Isaiah xix. 20.

⁵ Matt. xxi. 21, 22.

Zech. iv. 7.

⁶ Isaiah xli. 14, 15.

⁷ 1 Tim. vi. 12.

⁸ Jer. xx. 10.

⁹ Acts ix. 31.

¹⁰ Psalm ciii. 14.

¹¹ Psalm cxxxv. 3. 1 Cor. x. 13.

¹² Luke i. 74.

posed the unsoundness of their own hearts, when the supplication has been heard, the deliverance granted, *and the promise of obedience been forgotten!*

Fellow-Christian! have your circumstances of trial ever dictated this prayer? How then have you improved your liberty, when the answer has been vouchsafed? Has the "way of escape made" for you been kept in grateful remembrance?¹ Has the effect of your "deliverance" been visible in an increasing love and devotedness to the Lord's service? Oh! let a special Ebenezer be set up to mark this special achievement of prayer.² Let the mercy be connected with the sympathy of our "faithful and merciful High-Priest, who being himself touched with the feeling of your infirmities" has pleaded for your succor and release.³ And be encouraged henceforth to tread the ways of God with more firmness and sensible stay, "having your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace."⁴ But remember—the blessing of the cross is lost, if it does not issue in a song of praise—if we have not taken it up as a token of fatherly love. At all times the safest and shortest way to peace, is to let God use his own methods with us; to live the present moment to him in the situation in which he has placed us; not dreaming of other circumstances more favorable to our spiritual prosperity; but leaving ourselves, our difficulties, our discouragements, in his hands, who makes no mistakes in any of his dispensations—but who orders them all, that they may "turn to our salvation, through our prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."⁵

135. *Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes.*

IF the Lord "deliver us from the oppression of man," and "make even our enemies to be at peace with us;"⁶ still, if we are in spiritual health, we shall be restless and uneasy, until he "make his face to shine upon us." And in the Scripture revelation of God, "dwelling between the cherubims,"⁷ and therefore on the mercy-seat⁸—with the "rainbow," the emblem of "the covenant of peace," "round about the throne,"⁹ as if to invite the access of sinners, from every quarter—have we not full warrant to plead, "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth; stir up thy strength, and come and save us? Turn us again, O God; and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved."¹⁰ Others we see eagerly asking, "Who will show us any good?" Alas! they will discover in the end, that they have "spent their money for that which is not bread, and their labor for that which satisfieth not."¹¹ The believer's incessant cry is—Let me see "the King's face."¹² This is a blessing worth praying for. It is his heart's de-

¹ Comp. 2 Chron. xxxii. 22—25, with Psalm ix. 13, 14.

³ Heb. iv. 15; ii. 18.

⁴ Eph. vi. 15.

⁶ Prov. xvi. 7.

⁷ 2 Kings xix. 15. Psalm xcix. 1.

² 1 Sam. vii. 12.

⁵ Phil. i. 19.

⁸ Exod. xxv. 17—22, with Rom. iii. 25.

⁹ Rev. iv. 3.

Ezek. x. 1—5.

¹⁰ Ps. lxxx. 1—3.

¹¹ Isaiah lv. 2, with Psalm iv. 6.

¹² Comp. Prov. xvi. 15.

sire, his present privilege, and—what is infinitely better—his sure and everlasting joy. “*They shall see his face.*”¹

It is both important and interesting to mark the repetitions—always new—in this beautiful Psalm. David had just before prayed, “*Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me.*”² Perhaps another passing cloud had passed his sky. Again he darts up the same prayer, “*Make thy face to shine upon thy servant.*” Such cries in the mouth of this holy servant of God, must have been most hopeless petitions—nay, the expression of the most daring presumption,—had he not been acquainted with the only true way of access to God, joyfully led to renounce every other way, and enabled diligently to improve this acceptable approach to his God. Indeed whatever obscurity may hang over the question relating to the faith of the Old Testament believers, their confidence at the throne of grace shows them to have attained a far more distinct perception of Christian privilege, through the shadowy representations of their law, than is commonly imagined. Else how could they have been so wrestling and persevering in their petitions; overcoming the spirit of bondage, and breathing out the spirit of adoption in the expression of their wants and desires before the Lord? The prayers of the Old Testament church are not more distinguished for their simplicity, spirituality, and earnestness, than for their unfettered, evangelical confidence. When they approached the footstool of the Divine Majesty, with the supplications, “*Make thy face to shine upon thy servant*”—“*Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth*”—it was as if they had pleaded, “*Reconciled Father, thou that sittest upon a throne of grace—look upon us!*—*Abba, Father, be gracious to us!*”

Many, however, seem to despise this child-like confidence. They go on in heartless complaining and uncertain apprehensions of their state; as if *doubting* was their life, and as if they might rest upon the presumption, that the “*shining of God's face upon them*” is not indispensable to their salvation. But will they then be content to “be saved, yet so as by fire,” instead of having “an entrance ministered unto them *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour?”³ Is it enough for them to be *just alive*, when “the things that remain,” from want of being duly cherished, “are ready to die?” If they can be safe without a conscious interest in the favor of God, can they be so without the desire for it? Is not this assurance attainable? Is it not commanded?⁴ Is it not most desirable? This cold contentment clouds the integrity of their profession. For God's real people are living habitually either in spiritual enjoyment, or in restless dissatisfaction. Their dark seasons are times of wrestling supplication⁵—seasons of deep humiliation,⁶ tenderness of spirit,⁷ and constant waiting upon God,⁸ until he “*makes his face to shine upon his servants.*” They can

¹ Rev. xxii. 4.

² Verse 132.

³ Comp. 1 Cor. iii. 15. ² Peter i. 11.

⁴ See 2 Cor. xiii. 5. Heb. vi. 11. ² Peter i. 10.

⁵ Ps. lxxxviii. 1—3; cxxx. 1, 2.

⁶ Lam. iii. 20—22. Micah vii. 9.

⁷ Lam. iii. 31—40.

⁸ Psalm xl. 1—3; cxxx. 5, 6. Isaiah viii. 17; l. 10.

dispense with ordinary comforts. But it is death to be without him. "All their springs are in him." They estimate their happiness by the *shining*—and their misery by the clouding—*of his face*. This is the true principle of assurance, even if this most important blessing be not sensibly enjoyed.

How then stands the case between us and God? From ourselves originates the mist, which darkens the *shining*.¹ His sovereign free grace blots the cloud away.² We raise the mountains of separation.³ The Almighty power of our great Zerubbabel removes them.⁴ To ourselves then be all the shame. To him be all the praise!

But how may we realize more constant sunshine? Apart from the hindrances just alluded to, others are mainly to be found in mistaken or contracted views of the Gospel. Hence, therefore, the value of enlarged apprehensions of the Gospel of the grace of God—of its fulness, satisfying every claim, and supplying every want—of its freeness, unincumbered with conditions, and holding forth encouragement to the most unworthy—of its holiness, restraining the hindrances to enjoyment—and of its security, affording permanent rest in the foundations of the covenant of grace. The life of faith will thus be maintained in more full contemplation of Jesus, and renewed reliance upon him; and walking in closer communion with him, our hope will be enlivened with the constant sense of reconciliation and love.

We need not wonder at the Psalmist's persevering determination to seek "*the shining of the Lord's face*." This high privilege is connected no less with the Christian's public usefulness than with his personal enjoyment. For who is most likely to win others to the love of the Saviour, and to the service of God—to enliven the drooping soul, or to recover the backslider? Is it not he, who lives most in the sunshine of the Gospel, and who therefore has most to tell of its heavenly joy? But you say, 'My heart, alas! is so cold and barren, my affections so languid, my desires so faint, my sky so often clouded. I do not forget *that I am a child; but a child in disgrace* is too often my dishonorable character and wretched condition.' Then exercise your faith in going where David was wont to go. As a penitent child, "arise, and go to your Father"—"only acknowledge your iniquity"⁵—tell your complaint before him—resort much and often to him; be importunate; be patient; plead the name⁶ and merits of Jesus; and you will not, you cannot, plead in vain; you will once more walk happily, holily, as well as confidently, in the light of your Father's countenance. And in marking more carefully his gracious dealings with your soul, you will be kept from formality, hardness, and despondency.

But we cannot expect this *shining*, save in the paths of God;⁷ and he who looks for comfort, while careless of duty, is only the

¹ Isaiah lvii. 17.² Ib. xliv. 22.³ Ib. lix. 2.⁴ Zech. iv. 7.⁵ Jer. iii. 13.⁶ John xiv. 13, 14.⁷ Ib. 21—23.

Isa. lxiv. 5. Gal. vi. 16.

victim of his own delusions. Well, therefore, does the child of God—longing for higher enjoyment, and learning more of his own ignorance, add his petition, “*Teach me thy statutes.*” And he that taught us this petition, will himself, according to his promise, be our teacher in the way of holiness.¹ And if, under his teaching, in the pathway to glory—our God “*makes his face to shine upon us,*” what more want we to beguile the toil and weariness of the way? And if one beam of his countenance, though but dimly seen through this sinful medium, exceeds the glories of ten thousand worlds—what will it be to live under the perpetual cloudless “*shining of his face!*”

Believer! does not this prospect invigorate every step of your journey? Your Lord is at hand. Soon will he appear to gladden with his inexpressible smile every soul that is in readiness for him. Oh! seek to realize his approach, and with holy aspirations and joyful expectancy respond to his welcome voice, “*He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly: Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*”²

136. *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes,*³ *because they keep not thy law.*

If the Lord *teaches us* the privileges of his *statutes*, he will teach us compassion for those who *keep them not*. This was the mind of Jesus. His life exhibited one, whose ‘heart was made of tenderness.’ But there were some occasions, when the display of his compassion was peculiarly striking. Near the close of his life, it is recorded, that, “when he was come near, and beheld ‘the city’—“beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth”⁴—but now given up to its own ways, and “wrath coming upon it to the uttermost,” he “wept over it.”⁵ It was then a moment of triumph. The air was rent with hosannahs. The road was strewed with branches from the trees, and all was joy and praise.⁶ Amid all this exultation, the Saviour alone seemed to have no voice for the triumph—no heart for joy. His omniscient mind embraced all the spiritual desolation of this sad case; and he could only weep in the midst of a solemn triumph. “*Rivers of waters ran down his eyes, because they kept not his law.*”

Now a Christian in this as in every other feature will be conformed to the image of his Lord. His heart will therefore be touched with a tender concern for the honor of his God, and a pitying concern for those wretched sinners, that “*keep not his law,*” and are perishing in their own transgressions. Thus was “*just Lot*” in Sodom, “*vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.*”⁷ Thus did Moses “fall down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; *he did neither eat bread nor drink water, because of all their sins which they had sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger.*”⁸ Thus also

¹ Ezek. xxxvi. 27. ² Rev. xxii. 20. ³ Comp. Jer. ix. 1; xiv. 17. Lam. ii. 18.

⁴ Psalm xlviii. 2.

⁵ Luke xix. 41. Comp. Matt. xxiii. 37, also Mark iii. 5.

⁶ Comp. Luke xix. 36—40.

⁷ 2 Peter ii. 7, 8.

⁸ Deut. ix. 18, 19.

Samuel, in the anticipation of the Lord's judgments upon Saul, "*grieved himself, and cried unto the Lord all night.*"¹ Ezra, on a similar occasion in the deepest prostration of sorrow, "*rent his garment and his mantle, and plucked off the hair of his head and of his beard, and sat down astonished until the evening sacrifice.*"² And if David was now suffering from *the oppression of man*,³ yet his own injuries never drew from him such expressions of overwhelming sorrow, as did the sight of the despised law of his God.

Need we advert to this tender spirit, as a special characteristic of "the minister of the Lord?" Can they fail in this day of abounding wickedness—even within the bounds of their own sphere—to hear the call to "weep between the porch and the altar?"⁴ How instructive is the posture of the ancient prophet—first pleading openly with the rebellion of the people—then "his soul weeping in secret places for their pride?"⁵ Not less instructive is the great apostle—his "conscience bearing witness in the Holy Ghost to his *great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh.*"⁶ In reproving transgressors, he could only write to them "*out of much affliction and anguish of heart with many tears,*"⁷ and in speaking of them to others, with the same tenderness of spirit, he adds, "*Of whom I tell you even weeping.*"⁸ Tears were these, of Christian eloquence no less than of Christian compassion.

Thus uniformly is the character of God's people represented—not merely as those that are *free from*, but as "*those that sigh and that cry for all the abominations, that be done in the midst of the land.*" They—they alone—are marked out for mercy in the midst of impending, universal ruin.⁹ The want of this spirit is ever a feature of hardness and pride—a painful blot upon the profession of the Gospel.¹⁰ How wide the sphere presenting itself on every side for the unrestrained exercise of this yearning compassion! The appalling spectacle of a world apostatized from God, of multitudes sporting with everlasting destruction—as if the God of heaven were "a man that he should lie,"¹¹ is surely enough to force "*rivers of waters*" from the hearts of those who are concerned for his honor. What a mass of sin ascends as a cloud before the Lord, from a single heart! Add the aggregate of a village—a town—a country—a world! every day—every hour—every moment—well might the "*rivers of waters*" rise to an overflowing tide, ready to burst its barriers. We speak not of outward sensibility (in which some may be constitutionally deficient, and the exuberance of which may be no sign of real spiritual affection) but we ask—Do we lay to heart the perishing condition of our fellow-sinners? Could we witness a house on fire, without speedy and prac-

¹ 1 Sam. xv. 11, 35.² Ezra ix. 3, 4.³ Verse 134.⁴ Joel ii. 17.⁵ Jer. xiii. 17.⁶ Rom. ix. 1—3.⁷ 2 Cor. ii. 4.⁸ Phil. iii. 18. Comp. Acts xx. 19.⁹ Ezek. ix. 4.¹⁰ 1 Cor. v. 2.¹¹ Numb. xxiii. 16.

tical evidence of our compassion for the inhabitants? And yet, alas! how often do we witness souls on the brink of destruction—unconscious of danger, or bidding defiance to it—with comparative indifference! How are we Christians, if we believe not the Scripture warnings of their danger? or if, believing them, we do not bestir ourselves to their help? What hypocrisy is it to pray for their conversion, while we are making no effort to promote it? Oh! let it be our daily supplication, that this indifference concerning their everlasting state may give place to a spirit of weeping tenderness; that we may not be living, as if this world were really, what it appears to be, ‘a world without souls;’ that we may never see the Sabbaths of God profaned, his laws trampled under foot, the ungodly “breaking their bands asunder, and casting away their cords from them,”¹ without a more determined resolution ourselves to *keep these laws of our God*, and to plead for their honor with these obstinate transgressors. Have we no near and dear relatives, yet “lying in wickedness—dead in trespasses and sins?” To what blessed family, reader, do you belong, where there are no such objects of pity? But be it so—it is well. Yet are you silent? Have you no ungodly, ignorant neighbors around you? And are they unwarned as well as unconverted? Do you visit them in the way of courtesy or kindness, yet give them no word of affectionate entreaty on the concerns of eternity? Let our families indeed possess, as they ought to possess, the first claim to our compassionate regard. Then let our parishes, our neighborhood, our country, the world, find a place in our affectionate, prayerful, and earnest consideration.

Nor let it be supposed, that the doctrine of sovereign and effectual grace has any tendency to paralyze exertion. So far from it, the most powerful supports to perseverance are derived from this source. Left to himself—with only the invitations of the Gospel—not a sinner could ever have been saved. Added to these—there must be the Almighty energy of God—the seal of his secret purpose—working upon the sinner’s will, and winning the heart to God. Not that this sovereign work prevents any from being saved. But it prevents the salvation from being in vain to all, by securing its application to some. The invitations manifest the pardoning love of God; but they change not the rebel heart of man. They show his enmity; but they slay it not. They leave him without excuse—yet at the same time—they be applied—without salvation. The moment of life in the history of the saved sinner is, when he is “made willing in the day of the Lord’s power,”²—when he comes—he looks—he lives. It is this dispensation alone gives the Christian laborer the spring of energy and hope. The palpable and awful proofs on every side, of the “enmity of the carnal mind against God,” rejecting alike both his law and his Gospel, threaten to sink him in despondency. And nothing sustains his tender and compassionate interest, but the assurance of the power of God to remove the resisting medium, and of his purpose to accomplish the subjugation.

¹ Psalm ii. 3.

² Ib. cx. 3.

tion of natural corruption in a countless multitude of his redeemed people.

The same yearning sympathy forms the life, the pulse, and the strength of Missionary exertion, and has ever distinguished those honored servants of God, who have devoted their time, their health, their talents, their all, to the blessed work of "saving souls from death, and covering a multitude of sins."¹ Can we conceive of a Missionary living in the spirit of his work—surrounded with thousands of mad idolaters, hearing their shouts, and witnessing their abominations, without a weeping spirit? Indignant grief for the dishonor done to God—amazement at this affecting spectacle of human blindness—detestation of human impiety—compassionate yearnings over human wretchedness and ruin—all combine to force tears of the deepest sorrow from a heart enlightened and constrained by the influence of a Saviour's love.² This, as we have seen, was our Master's spirit. And let none presume themselves to be Christians, if they are destitute of "this mind that was in Christ Jesus;"³ if they know nothing of His melting compassion for a lost world, or of his burning zeal for his heavenly Father's glory.

Oh! for that deep realizing sense of the preciousness of immortal souls, that would make us look at every sinner we meet as a soul to be "pulled out of the fire," and to be drawn to Christ;—which would render us willing to endure suffering, reproach, and the loss of all, so that we might win one soul to God, and raise one monument to His everlasting praise! Happy mourner in Zion! whose tears over the guilt and wretchedness of a perishing world are the outward indications of thy secret pleadings with God, and the effusion of a heart solemnly dedicated to the salvation of thy fellow-sinners!

¹ James v. 20.

² 'My God! I feel the mournful scene;
My bowels yearn o'er dying men;
And fain my pity would reclaim,
And snatch the fire-brands from the flame.

But feeble my compassion proves,
And can but weep where most it loves;
Thine own all-saving arm employ,
And turn these drops of grief to joy.'

³ See Phil. ii. 4—7.

PART XVIII.

137. *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments.*—138. *Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded, are righteous, and very faithful.*

THE advancing Christian learns to adore the awful perfections of his God, and to acknowledge his *righteous* character and government, even when “his ways are in the sea, and his paths in the great waters.” “Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.”² We have already brought out the unvarying testimony of his people to the righteous character of his afflictive dispensations.³ Even from haughty Pharaoh was a similar acknowledgment extorted.⁴ Adonibezek also, under the blow of his hand, cried out, “As I have done, so God hath requited me.”⁵

Yet in this path “we walk by faith, not by sight.”⁶ *Often in Providence* “his footsteps are not known.”⁷ We cannot trace the reasons of the Divine mind. We must wait, and “see the end of the Lord,” when the disjointed pieces shall be compacted into one complete texture and frame-work. “At evening time it shall be light.”⁸ *Much more in the dispensations of grace* do we hear the voice,—“Be still, and know that I am God.”⁹ Doubtless he could give his grace to all as well as to some. Yet none have a claim upon him. Is it not his to do what he will with his own? “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” “shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”¹⁰ Thus much is plain—enough to silence cavil, and justify God—grace is freely offered to all. Man’s own will rejects it, and leaves him without excuse.¹¹ Effectual grace is withheld from none, but those who deserve that it should be so. None are forced to sin. None are condemned without guilt.¹² Therefore when we stand upon the ocean’s brink, and cry—“Oh! the depth!” are we not constrained to the adoring acknowledgment, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments.* And if this be our praise, even while “we see but as through a glass darkly, and know but in part,” how much more, in the world of unclouded day, when we shall see “face to face, and know even as we are known”¹³—shall we sing with reverential joy “the song of the Lamb—Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! *just and true are thy ways,* thou King of saints!”¹⁴

The young Christian, however, less able to grasp those deeper apprehensions, exercises himself chiefly in His more engaging perfections of long-suffering, goodness, and love. It is therefore a sat-

¹ Psalm lxvii. 19.² Ib. xvii. 2. Comp. Deut. xxxii. 4.³ Verse. 75.⁴ Exod. ix. 27.⁵ Judges i. 7. Comp. 2 Chron. xii. 6.⁶ 2 Cor. v. 7.⁷ Psalm lxxvii. 19.⁸ Zech. xiv. 7.⁹ Psalm xlvii. 10.¹⁰ Matt. xx. 15. Rom. ix. 19. Gen. xviii. 25.¹¹ Matt. xxiii. 37. John v. 40.¹² Rom. xi. 33.¹³ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.¹⁴ Rev. xv. 3.

isfactory evidence of growth in grace, when our habitual contemplation of God fixes upon our minds the more full and awful displays of his character; and we gather from thence an increase of light, peace, humility, and consolation. But the cross of Calvary harmonizes to our view at once the most appalling and the most encouraging attributes. Though his own declaration—that “he will by no means clear the guilty”¹—seemed to present an insurmountable barrier to the purpose of mercy; yet, rather than the glory of a God of love should be obscured, or his righteous law should be mitigated, “he spared not his own Son”²—he “made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us.”³

And do not we naturally argue from his nature to *his testimonies*? If he be *righteous*, nothing unrighteous can come from him. His *testimonies* therefore are his lively image—like himself—*righteous and very faithful*—requiring nothing impossible—nothing unsuitable—perfect love to God and man⁴—“our reasonable service,”⁵ no less our privilege than our duty to render. None that are blessed with a spiritual apprehension of their nature, and are conformed and framed to them, will hesitate in setting their seal to the inscription, “*The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good!*”⁶

But let us take care to exhibit the practical influence of our contemplations of the character and government of God. The unconverted—far from understanding or subscribing to our acknowledgment—complain, “*The ways of the Lord are not equal.*” “*My punishment is greater than I can bear.*”⁷ And so opposed are the “*righteous judgments of God*” to the perverseness of corrupt nature, that even with the child of God there is much murmuring within, that needs to be stilled—much repining to be hushed—much impatience to be repressed—many hard thoughts to be lamented, resisted, and banished. Did we believe more simply, how much more joy would there be in our faith, and readiness in our submission! How clearly would our experience show, that the Lord is upright; he is our rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him!⁸ In returning, then, “and rest shall we be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be our strength.”⁹ In the submissive acknowledgment of the Lord’s dispensations, “our peace” will flow “as a river;”¹⁰ more deep and extensive as it approaches the ocean, and fertilizing our souls with an abundant harvest of spiritual peace and enjoyment.

139. *My zeal hath consumed me; because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.*

SUCH was David’s high estimation of *the testimonies of his God*, that his spirits were *consumed* with vehement grief in witnessing their neglect. He could bear that “*his enemies*” should *forget him*;

¹ Exod. xxxiv. 7.

² Rom. viii. 32.

³ 2 Cor. v. 21.

⁴ Matt. xxii. 37—39.

⁵ Rom. xii. 1.

⁶ Ps. xix. 9. Rom. vii. 12.

⁷ Ezek. xviii. 25. Gen. iv. 13.

⁸ Psalm xcii. 15.

⁹ Isaiah xxx. 15.

¹⁰ Ib. xlvi. 18.

but his "zeal" could not endure that they should "*forget the words of his God.*" Zeal is a passion, whose real character must be determined by the objects on which it is employed, and the principle by which it is directed. There is a true and a false zeal, differing as widely from each other, as an heavenly flame from the infernal fire. The one is fervent disinterested affection, expanding the heart, and delighting to unite with the whole empire of God in the pursuit of a good, which all may enjoy without envious rivalry. The other is a selfish, interested principle, contracting the heart, and ready to sacrifice the good of mankind, and even the glory of God, to its own individual advantage.¹ Were its power proportioned to its native tendency, or were it to operate extensively in an associated body; it would end in detaching its several members each from their centre; in disuniting them from each other; and, as far as its influence could reach, crumbling the moral system into discordant atoms. Too often does this baneful principle exemplify itself in the church—either in an obstinate opposition to the truth of the Gospel,² or in a self-willed contention for its own party.³ "This wisdom descendeth not from above; but is earthly, sensual, devilish."⁴ How much also of that misguided heat, that spends itself upon the externals of religion,⁵ or would "call fire down from heaven" in defence of fundamental truths, may be found among us, exposing its blind devotees to our Master's tender rebuke, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of!"⁶

Often also do we see a distempered counterfeit zeal, disproportioned in its exercise, wasting its strength upon the subordinate parts of the system and comparatively feeble in its maintenance of the vital doctrines of Christ.⁷ Thus it disunites the Church by adherence to points of difference, instead of compacting the Church together by strengthening the more important points of agreement. Often again, by the same process in practical religion, are the "mint, anise, and cummin" vehemently contended for; "while the weightier matters of the law"⁸ are little regarded.

Widely different from this fervor of selfishness, is that genuine zeal, which marks the true disciple of our Lord. Enlightened by the word of God, and quickened into operation by the love of Christ, it both shines and warms at the same moment. It is indeed the kindled fire of heavenly love, exciting the most tender desires and constant efforts for the best interests of every child of man, so far as its sphere can reach; and bounded only by a consistent regard to the general welfare of the whole. Thus earnest and compassionate in its influence, awakened to a sense of the preciousness of immortal souls, and the overwhelming importance of eternity, it is never at a loss to discover an extended sphere for its most vehement and constraining exercises. While it hates the sins that

¹ Matt. xxiii. 15. Gal. vi. 12, 13.

² John xvi. 2. Rom. x. 2, 3. Gal. i. 13, 14. Phil. iii. 6.

⁴ James iii. 15.

⁵ Matt. xv. 1, 2; xxiii. 25.

³ Gal. iv. 17.

⁶ Luke ix. 54, 55.

⁷ Rom. xiv. 1—6.

⁸ Matt. xxiii. 23.

pass on every side before its view, it is all gentleness to the sinner; and would gladly weep tears of blood over those who are deaf to the voice of persuasion, could such tears avail to turn them from their iniquity. But, knowing all human unassisted efforts to be insufficient, it gives to the world its protest against the abominations which it is too feeble to prevent; and then hastens to the secret chamber to pour out its wrestling desires in the tenderness of our Master's intercession, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."¹

Such was the zeal of the ancient Lawgiver, whose spirit (though, as it regarded his own cause, "*meek above all the men which were upon the face of the earth,*"²) "*waxed hot*"³ on witnessing the grievous dishonor done to his God during his absence on the mount. At the same time, (as if more clearly to distinguish the holy burning from the heat of his own spirit,) how fervently did he plead his people's cause in secret before his God, as he had manifested his concern for the honor of his God before the congregation!⁴ Surely he could have taken up this language, "*My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.*" Burning with the same holy flame, the great Old Testament Reformer bore his testimony against the universal prevalence of idolatry; making use of the arm of temporal power,⁵ and of the yet greater power of secret complaint,⁶ to stem the torrent of iniquity. The same impulse in later times marked the conduct of the Apostles; when, "rending their clothes, and running in among" a frantic multitude of idolaters, by all the power of their entreaties "*they were scarcely able to restrain the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.*"⁷ On another occasion the great Apostle, forgetting "the goodly stones and buildings" that met his eyes at Athens—found "*his spirit stirred up in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.*"⁸ In another city "was he pressed in spirit"⁹ by the intensity of his interest for the souls of his fellow-sinners, and his Master's work.

Yet this is not a heat that wastes itself without a proportionate object. The truth of God is the grand object. Not one atom of its dust shall be lost. For its fundamentals—all consequences must be hazarded¹⁰—yea, life itself—if need be—sacrificed.¹¹ Nor does this fervor expend in strong impulses that wear out without fruit. It is a constant affection in "a good thing."¹² Nor is it an undisciplined burst of warm feeling, but a sober controlled exercise of Christian judgment. The Apostle—with his inexpressible abhorrence of idolatry, yet remained in the midst of it for two, perhaps three, years—faithfully employed in his Master's work; yet waiting for the fittest time of open protest against Diana's worship.¹³ So admirably

¹ Luke xxiii. 34.² Numb. xii. 3, 13.³ Exod. xxxii. 19.⁴ Ib. xxxii. 30—32.⁵ 1 Kings xviii. 17—40.⁶ Ib. xix. 10.⁷ Acts xiv. 13—18.⁸ Ib. xvii. 16.⁹ Ib. xviii. 5.¹⁰ Gal. ii. 5.¹¹ Acts xx. 24. Phil. ii. 17. Rev. xii. 11.¹² Gal. iv. 18.¹³ Acts xix. 10; xx. 20, 21.

is "the spirit of power and love" disciplined by "the spirit of a sound mind."¹

But, "compassed about, as we are, with so great a cloud of witnesses"² let us yet turn aside to look unto One greater than all—to One, whose example in every temper of Christian conduct affords equal direction and encouragement. Jesus could testify to his Father, "*The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*"³ He was ever ready to put aside even lawful engagements and obligations, when they interfered with this paramount demand.⁴ Yet was his *zeal* tempered with a careful restraint from needless offence. Rather would he work a miracle,⁵ and retreat from publicity,⁶ than seem to give occasion to those that might desire it. And if we bear the stamp of his disciples, without rushing into offence in the waywardness of our own spirits, while rejoicing to have our own "names cast out as evil,"⁷ we shall at the same time be tender of any reflection on the name of our God, as of our dearest friend and benefactor. We shall feel any slight of his honor as sensitively as a wound to our own reputation; nor shall we hesitate to thrust ourselves between, to receive on ourselves any strokes that may be aimed at his cause.⁸ This combined spirit of self-denial and self-devotedness, kindles the flame, which "many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown."⁹ '*I could bear,*' said holy Brainerd, '*any desertion or spiritual conflict, if I could but have my heart burning all the while within me with love to God, and desires for his glory.*'¹⁰ It is indeed a delightful exercise, to "spend and be spent" in the service of Him, who for our sakes was even consumed by the fire of his own zeal.¹¹

However, the surest evidence of Christian zeal is—when it begins at home—in a narrow scrutiny, and "vehement revenge" against the sins of our own hearts.¹² Do we mourn *over our own forgetfulness of God's words*? Are we zealous to redeem the loss to our Saviour's cause from this sinful neglect? And do we plainly show, that our opposition to sin in the ungodly is the opposition of love? And is this love manifested to the persons and souls of those whose doctrines and practice we are constrained to resist, and in a careful restraint from the use of unhallowed "carnal weapons" in this spiritual "warfare?"¹³

Perhaps the weak, timid child of God may be saying, 'I can do nothing for my God. I suffer his *words to be forgotten*, with little or no success in my efforts to prevent it.' Are you then making an effort? Every work done in faith bears fruit to God and to his church. You may not see it. But let your secret chamber witness to your zeal; and the Lord "will not be unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love."¹⁴ He will even strengthen you for your dreaded conflict—the open confession of his cause—"For he hath

¹ 2 Tim. i. 7.² Heb. xii. 1.³ Ps. lxxix. 9, with John ii. 17.

Isa. lix. 17.

⁴ Luke ii. 49.⁵ Matt. xvii. 24—27.⁶ John vi. 15.⁷ Luke vi. 22.

Acts v. 41.

⁸ Ps. lxxix. 9. Rom. xv. 3. Comp. Ps. lxxxix. 50, 51.⁹ Cant. viii. 7.¹⁰ Brainerd's Diary. Edwards' Works, iii. 107.¹¹ Luke xii. 50.¹² Comp. 2 Cor. vii. 11. Rev. iii. 19.¹³ See 2 Cor. x. 4. James i. 20.¹⁴ Heb. vi. 10.

chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty."¹ Or, should peculiar trials restrain the boldness of your profession, you may be found in the end to have made as effectual resistance to the progress of sin by your intercession before God, as those who have shown a more open front in the face of the world.

140. *Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it.*

THE Psalmist's *love* for the law of his God may account for the "zeal" he felt on account of its general neglect. All other systems of religion (or rather of "philosophy falsely so called") allure their disciples by the indulgence of carnal lust or self-complacent pride. *The word of God* outweighs them all in its chief excellence—peculiar to itself—its purity. "Every word is *very pure*"²—tried to the uttermost" in the furnace, and found to be absolutely without dross.³ Its promises are without a shadow of change or unfaithfulness. Its precepts reflect the holy image of their Divine Author. In a word it contains 'truth without any mixture of error for its matter'⁴—"*Therefore thy servant loveth it.*"

'No one but a true servant of God can *therefore love it*, because it is *pure*; since he who loves it must desire to be like it, to feel its efficacy, to be reformed by it.⁵ The unlettered believer cannot well discern its *sublimity*; but he loves it for its *holiness*. The mere scholar, on the other hand, *admires* its sublimity—but the *secrets* which it reveals (such as the pride of the natural heart struggles to conceal) forbid him to love it.⁶ Its purity, which is the matter of love to the one, excites enmity in the other. From "the glass" which shows him "his natural face"—his neglected obligations—his fearfully self-deluded state—and his appalling prospects—he turns away in disgust. The indulgence of sin effectually precludes the benefit of the most industrious search into the word of God. The heart must undergo an entire renewal—it must be sanctified and cleansed, yea, be "baptized with the Holy Ghost,"⁷ before it can discern, or—when it has discerned—can love, the purity of the word of God.

Witness the breathings of Brainerd's soul in this holy atmosphere, '*Oh that my soul were holy, as he is holy! Oh that it were pure even as Christ is pure; and perfect, as my Father in heaven is perfect! These I feel are the sweetest commands in God's book, comprising all others.*'⁸ '*Oh how refreshing*'—exclaims the beloved Martyn—'*and supporting to my soul was the holiness of the word of God! Sweeter than the sweetest promise at this time, was the constant and manifest tendency of the word, to lead men to holiness and the deepest seriousness.*'⁹

The valuable end for which we "desire this word" is, "that we

¹ 1 Cor. i. 27.

² Prov. xxx. 5. Ps. xix. 8.

³ Prayer Book translation. Comp. Ps. xii. 6.

⁴ Locke.

⁵ Bp. Horne *in loco*.

⁶ See John iii. 20.

⁷ Matt. iii. 11.

⁸ Edwards' Works, iii. 171.

⁹ Martyn's Life, pp. 206, 207.

may grow thereby,"¹—grow in purity of heart and conduct; learning to shrink from the touch of sin; "cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God."² Our "esteem" for it—"more than our necessary food"³—will be in proportion to our growth in grace, an evidence of this growth, and a constant spring of holy enjoyment.

An additional excitement to *love its purity* is the exhibition of *that purity* imbodyed in our perfect pattern in Him, "*who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.*"⁴ For the habit of beholding the Saviour with the eye of faith in the glass of the word, conforms us to his image.⁵ But be it ever remembered, that its holiness can have no fellowship, and communicate no life, except in its own atmosphere. Oh! for a larger influence of the Spirit of God upon our souls, that we may enjoy the purifying delights of the word of God; that we may live in it, live by it, to the glory of our dear Redeemer, and to the edification of his Church!

141. *I am small and despised; yet do not I forget thy precepts.*

EVIDENTLY David did not *love the word* for selfish gain. "*Small and despised*" was his condition, when the Lord first looked on him.⁶ It was also the reproach, which in the height of his glory he endured for the name of his God.⁷ "*Yet—stripped and destitute as he might be—did he not forget his precepts.*" The remembrance of his God was a cheering encouragement to his faith in his lowly condition;⁸ and no less his support in the far greater trials of his prosperity. Thus habitually did he realize the unspeakable privilege of an ever-present God!

The objects of the Lord's sovereign choice,⁹ whom he has stamped as a "peculiar treasure unto him above all people," and whom at the day of his approaching he will bring forth as the "jewels"¹⁰ of his crown—are most frequently in their worldly condition¹¹—always in the eyes of the world,¹² and in their own estimation,¹³—"small and despised." And yet pride and hypocrisy in the natural heart will sometimes assume this character for selfish ends. This language of humility is not unfrequently in the mouth of the professor, to enable him to maintain "a name to live" in the church of God. But are those, who call themselves "*small and despised,*" willing to be taken at their word? Are they content to be *despised* by those, whose esteem this "voluntary" spurious "humility" was meant to secure? Do they really believe themselves to be what they profess—false, vile, mean, deceitful creatures? Have they any experimental knowledge of the depth of inner wickedness—that God could open door after door in "the chamber of imagery" to confound them with the sight of greater, and yet "greater abominations?"¹⁴ When, therefore, they "take the lowest place," do they

¹ 1 Peter ii. 2.

² 2 Cor. vii. 1.

³ Job xxiii. 12.

⁴ Heb. vii. 26.

⁵ Com. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

⁶ 1 Sam. xvi. 11.

⁷ 2 Sam. vi. 20.

⁸ 1 Sam. xvii. 34—36.

⁹ Exod. xix. 5.

¹⁰ Mal. iii. 17.

¹¹ 1 Cor. i. 27—29.

James ii. 5.

¹² 1 Cor. iv. 9—13.

¹³ Ps. xl. 17. 1 Cor. xv. 9. Eph. iii. 8.

¹⁴ Ezek. viii. 5—15

feel it to be *their own place*? Or does not the language of self-abasement mean in the eyes of God—*‘Come see how humble I am?’*¹

Christian! think not these self-inquiries unnecessary for the cautious scrutiny of thine own heart. A self-annihilating spirit *before men*, as well as before God;—to feel “*small and despised*,” when we have a reputable name in the Church—is a rare attainment—a glorious triumph of victorious grace—usually the fruit of a sharp affliction. This was the spirit of Brainerd—that meek and lowly disciple of his Master, who would express his astonishment, that any one above the rank of “the beasts that perish” could condescend to notice him.² But if we are *small and despised* in the estimation of men, let us think of “Him, whom man despiseth—Him whom the nation abhorreth.”³ Never was such an instance of magnanimity displayed, as when Pilate brought out the blessed Jesus, arrayed in the mockery of royalty, and with the blood streaming from his temples; and said, “Behold the man!”⁴ Then was there a human being, sustaining himself in the simple exclusive consciousness of the favor of God, against the universal scorn of every face. This was independence—this was greatness indeed. With such a pattern before our eyes, and such a motive touching our hearts, we may well account it “a *very small thing*, that we should be judged of man’s judgment.”⁵ What upheld “the man Christ Jesus,” will uphold his servants also. “He committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”⁶ Must we not desire to “know the fellowship of his sufferings”—yea, to rejoice in the participation of them?⁷

Christian! dost thou love to be low, and still desire to be lower than ever? “*Small and despised*” as thou art in thine own eyes, and in the eyes of the world, “thou art precious in the eyes of him” who gave a price “for thy ransom”—infinitely more precious than “Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba,”⁸ and who will suffer “none to pluck

¹ Many hypocrites make great pretences to humility as well as other graces. But they cannot find out what a humble speech and behavior is, or how to speak and act, so that there may be indeed a savor of Christian humility in what they say or do. That sweet humble air and mien is beyond their art, being not “led by the Spirit,” or naturally guided to a behavior becoming holy humility by the vigor of a lowly spirit within them. And therefore they have no other way, but to be much in declaring that they are humble, and telling how they were humbled to the dust at such and such times, and abounding in very bad expressions about themselves,—such as—‘I have a dreadful wicked heart,’—‘Oh! this cursed heart of mine,’ &c. Such expressions are very often used—not with a heart broken—not with the tears of her that “washed Jesus’s feet with her tears”—not as “remembering and being confounded, and never opening their mouth because of their shame when God is pacified,” (Ezek. xvi. 63,) but with a light air, or with Pharisaical affectation.—*Edwards on Affections*, part iii. sect. vi.

² God feeds me with crumbs. Blessed be his name for anything! I felt a great desire that all God’s people should know how mean, and little, and vile I am, that they might see I am nothing, that so they might pray for me aright, and not have the least dependence upon me. I could not bear to think of Christians showing me any respect. I saw myself exceedingly vile and unworthy; so that I was ashamed that any one should bestow any favor upon me, or show me any respect.—*Brainerd’s Diary*.

³ Isa. xlix. 7. Comp. Psalm xxii. 6.

⁴ John xix. 5.

⁵ 1 Cor. iv. 3.

⁶ 1 Peter ii. 23.

⁷ Phil. iii. 10. 1 Peter iv. 13.

⁸ Comp. Isa. xliii. 3, 4, with Acts xx. 28.

thee out of his hands.”¹ Many may rebuke thee; many may scorn thee: even thy brethren may treat thee with contempt; yet thy God, thy Redeemer, will not depart from thee, will not suffer thee to depart from him; but will put his Spirit within thee, and bring forth his precepts to thy remembrance, that thou mayest keep them, and many a sweet supporting promise for thy consolation. Therefore, “fear not, *thou worm Jacob*: I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.”²

142. *Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.*

THE Psalmist, in the midst of his trials, could not “forget the precepts,” while he maintained so just a perception of their exalted character. His mind at this time seems to have been filled with the contemplation of the righteous government of God. He therefore repeats his adoration,³ not as applied to any particular instance—but as distinguishing the general character of His administration from “*everlasting*.”

But on whom is this government appointed to rest? Think of our Immanuel—the human brow encircled with Divine glory—the crucified hands wielding the sceptre of the universe—Him, whom they mocked as the king of the Jews, seated on his own exalted throne—“King of kings, and Lord of lords!” “*The government is upon his shoulder: and of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.*”⁴ How delightful to join Jehovah himself in the ascription of praise—“*Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom!*”⁵ How glorious also to praise that *everlasting righteousness*—the ground on which the administration of his Church is framed—which Jesus “brought in,” and “which is unto all them that believe;”⁶ which, when once clothed with it, is our infinite glory and reward!

“Every ordinance of man” is connected only with time. The Divine government has a constant reference to eternity, past and to come. “*And I heard,*” said the enraptured disciple, “*the angel of the waters say; Thou art righteous, which art, and wast, and shalt be; because thou hast judged thus.*”⁷ Every instance, therefore, of his righteous administration, is that display of the Divine character, which constrains the adoration of heaven. “One cried to another, and said, *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.*” His “*law*”—the manifestation of his “*righteousness*,”—“*is the truth.*” “*Thy word is true from the beginning! and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth forever.*”⁸

This truth is the law of righteousness, which Jesus bound himself to “fulfil”⁹—to which he “came to bear witness”¹⁰—and to which he commended his people to his Father as the means of their

¹ John x. 23.

² Isaiah xli. 14.

³ Comp. verse 137.

⁴ Isaiah ix. 6, 7.

⁵ Psalm xlv. 6. Heb. i. 8.

⁶ Dan. ix. 24. Rom. iii. 22.

⁷ Rev. xvi. 5.

⁸ Isaiah vi. 3.

⁹ Verse 160.

¹⁰ Matt. iii. 15.

¹¹ John xviii. 37.

sacrifications,¹ for what else is holiness, but the influences of *truth*, digested and practically imbodyed in the life and conduct? There may be fragments of truth elsewhere found—the scattered remnants of the fall. There may be systems imbued with large portions of *truth* deduced from this *law*. But here alone is it found perfect—unsullied. How carefully, therefore, should we test, by this standard every doctrine—every revelation;² receiving with implicit subjection all that is conformed to it;³ rejecting with uncompromising decision whatever will not abide the fiery trial.⁴ Most careful also should we be to preserve its unadulterated simplicity.⁵ Even the most seemingly trifling infusion of fundamental error is the grain of poison cast into the food, and making it “a savor of death unto death.” Such was the error of the Galatian Church—“another Gospel, yet not another”⁶—not deserving the name—*not putting ordinances in the stead of Christ*: an error too gross to beguile a Christian profession—but what is far more subtle, and equally destructive, *mixing them with Christ*; thus impairing the integrity of the foundation, paralyzing the springs, poisoning the sources of life, yea, converting life itself into death.⁷ Let this church stand out as a beacon to our own—as a much-needed warning to each of her members.

But in a more general view, let us adore the Divine revelation, as bearing so full an impress of a “God that cannot lie”—of a “covenant ordered in all things” beyond human contrivance, “and sure” beyond the possibility of a change.⁸ How many dying testimonies have sealed the truth of the precious promises! Joshua,⁹ Simeon,¹⁰ and a “cloud of witnesses with which we are compassed about,”¹¹ have “set to their seals that God is true”¹²—that “all the promises of God are in Christ Jesus yea and amen,”¹³—that “all are come to pass unto them, and not one thing has failed thereof.” Equally manifest is the truth of his threatenings. Hell is truth seen too late. Those on the right hand and those on the left, at the great day of God, will combine their testimony to the declaration of the “Faithful and True Witness,”¹⁴—“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”¹⁵

143. *Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me; yet thy commandments are my delights.*

CHRISTIAN! expect not unmixed sorrow or uninterrupted joy as your present portion. Heaven will be joy without sorrow. Hell will be sorrow without joy. Earth presents to you every joy mingled with grief—every grief tempered with joy. To be accounted “*small and despised*” does not comprise the whole of your trials. Like the great apostle, you must expect not only “*trouble*” without, but “*anguish*” within.¹⁶ Others may not have it.¹⁷ But your Sav-

¹ John xvii. 17.

² 1 Thess. v. 21. 1 John iv. 1.

³ Acts xvii. 11, 12.

⁴ Isaiah viii. 20. Gal. i. 8, 9.

⁵ 2 Cor. ii. 17; iv. 2.

⁶ Gal. i. 6, 7.

⁷ Ib. iv. 9—11; v. 1—4.

⁸ Titus i. 2. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

⁹ Josh. xxiii. 14.

¹⁰ Luke ii. 25—29.

¹¹ Heb. xii. 1.

¹² John iii. 33.

¹³ 2 Cor. i. 20.

¹⁴ Rev. iii. 14.

¹⁵ Matt. xxiv. 35.

¹⁶ 2 Cor. vii. 5; i. 8.

¹⁷ Psalm lv. 19; lxxiii. 3—5.

our engages, " *You shall.*"¹ To all his people he has not meted out the same measure. Some have rebuke. Some have a scourge. But all have the cross—and this a daily cross²—not a single or an occasional trial—but a life of trial—constant contradiction to the will—constant mortification of the flesh. And this *takes hold of us*. We cannot escape from it. Should we wish to escape it? This discipline, as Luther observes in his own way (and who was a better calculator in this school?) is more necessary for us than all the riches and dignities of the whole world. And the exercise of faith and patience in the endurance will bring more honor to God and profit to ourselves than a life of ease and indulgence. The instruction of the rod delivers us from its curse, and brings a substantial and enriching blessing.³

But how precious is the sympathy of Jesus—"in all things made like unto his brethren"—enduring *trouble and anguish* inconceivable to human apprehension, "that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest to succor his tempted people!"⁴ How does it lift up our head amid the billows, when in communion with our Lord we can call to mind, that his sorrow was for the sake of his dear purchased people; that they might drink their lighter cup bereft of its bitter ingredients!

The Psalmist did not find that the Lord afflicted him to leave him in misery, but rather to increase his happiness. *The precepts which he had not forgotten,*⁵ were now *his delights*. The scriptural records of the trials of the Lord's people bear similar abundant testimony to the inexhaustible resources of support in the Book of God; and they "are written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."⁶ The child of God, whose thoughts are habitually occupied in the word, will always find it to be his food and light, his joy and strength; witnessing within, the presence and power of God, even where its sensible comfort may not be enjoyed.

But specially is affliction the time that unfolds the *delights of the word*, such as more than counterbalance the painful *trouble and anguish* of the flesh. Such cheering prospects of hope and deliverance does it set forth! Such mighty supports in the endurance of trial does it realize! Truly the experimental power of the word in keeping the soul alive—much more than this—cheerful—sustained—established⁷—is there any blessing like this—the fruit of the cross? Can we mourn over that cross, that brings so gainful a harvest? The bitterness of the cross then best realizes the *delights of the commandments*. But never does the believer more "rejoice in tribulation," than when the "*trouble and anguish which take hold of him*" is for the love he bears to the name of his dear Lord.⁸ Persecution for his sake, far from appalling him, only endears his service to his heart. It is in his eyes—not a *penalty*

¹ John xvi. 33. Comp. Acts xiv. 22. 1 Thess. iii. 3. 2 Tim. iii. 12. Rev. vii. 14.

² Luke ix. 23. ³ Psalm xciv. 12. ⁴ Heb. ii. 17, 18. ⁵ Verse 141.

⁶ Rom. xv. 4. ⁷ Verse 92. ⁸ Deut. viii. 3. Matt. iv. 4. ⁹ Acts v. 41.

endured, but a privilege conferred, "to suffer for his name's sake."¹

But contrast the condition of the child of God and the follower of the world in the hour of affliction. The one in the midst of his troubles drinks of the fountain of all-sufficiency: and such is his peace and security, that, "in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him."² The other, "in the fulness of his sufficiency is in straits"³ David could look upward, and find the way of escape in the midst of his trouble: but for Saul, when "*trouble and anguish took hold of him,*" no source of comfort opened to his view. "God was departed from him, and was become his enemy."⁴ It was therefore "*trouble*" without support; "*anguish*" without relief,—"*trouble and anguish;*" such as will at length "*take hold of*" them that forget God, when nothing will be left, but the unavailing "*cry to the mountains and the hills to fall upon them, and cover them.*"⁵ Thanks be to God for deliverance from this fearful prospect! Thanks for the hope of unfading "*delights,*" when earthly pleasures shall have passed away! The first sheaf of the heavenly harvest will blot out the painful remembrance of the weeping seed-time which preceded it.⁶ The first moment of heaven will compensate for all the "*troubles and anguish*" of earth; and these moments will last throughout eternity. "*Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him,*"⁷ eternally well.

144. *The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting; give me understanding, and I shall live.*⁸

WHAT deep—weighty—impressive thoughts were exercising the Psalmist's mind! He had just marked the happy influence of *the testimonies* upon the believer's heart. Now he again recurs to their *righteousness*—as the Divine administration—not subject to the incessant variations of the human standard—but *everlasting*—of unalterable obligation—binding us unchangeably to God, and God to us. His creatures can virtually *make them void* by their rebellion;⁹ but they cannot change their character, or shake their foundation. Nay—themselves shall be the instruments of their fulfilment. Every word shall be established either by them as his obedient servants, or in and upon them as rebel transgressors. What solemn weight therefore is due to this Divine standard! It seems now to be trampled under foot; but its "*righteousness*"—inflexible in its demands, and unalterable in its obligations—will ere long assert its sovereignty over the world, when every other standard

¹ Phil. i. 29. One of the witnesses for the truth, when imprisoned for conscience' sake in Queen Mary's persecution of the Church, is said to have thus written to a friend:—"A prisoner for Christ! What is this for a poor worm? "Such honor have" not "all his saints." Both the degrees which I took in the University have not set me so high as the honor of becoming a prisoner of the Lord." Philpot, again, could say of his prison—"In the judgment of the world we are in hell; but I find in it the sweet consolations of heaven." So also holy Bradford—"My prison is sweeter to me than any parlor, than any pleasure I have had in all my life."

² Ps. xxxii. 6.

³ Job xx. 22.

⁴ 1 Sam. xxviii. 15, 16.

⁵ Rev. vi. 16.

⁶ Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.

⁷ Isa. iii. 10.

⁸ Comp. verses 137, 138.

⁹ Verse 126.

shall have passed away. It will be the rule of the Divine procedure at the great day of decision. When the "great white throne" is set up—when "the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books are opened, and another book is opened, which is the book of life; and the dead are judged out of those things which were written in the books, *according to their works*"¹—the acknowledgment will be made throughout the universe of God, "*The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting.*" How glorious is the confidence of being dealt with in that great day upon an *everlasting* foundation of *righteousness*?²

But this view of the Divine "*righteousness*," and "*everlasting*" obligation of the *testimonies*, naturally suggests the prayer for a more spiritual, enlightened, and experimental acquaintance with them. Often before had the petition been sent up.³ But who can cry too often or too earnestly? One ray of this "*understanding*" is of far higher value than all the intellectual or speculative knowledge in the world.⁴ If its first dawn exhibits the infinite difference between light and darkness—if prayer for it implies a measure already received, still—*Give me understanding*—will be the cry—not of the "little child" whose spiritual perception is just opening—but of the "father, who has known him that is from the beginning."⁵ "Let me know the holiness of thy "*testimonies*"—their extent—their perfection—their intimate connection with every part of my daily walk—with the restraint of my inclination, the regulation of my temper, the direction of every step of my path. And indeed the more devoutly we study them, the more shall we feel our need of supplication for Divine teaching, to give us more adoring and thankful views of the government of God, and to subjugate our cavilling disposition to the humbling influence of faith.⁶

The principle of spiritual and eternal life flows from the enlightened perception of the testimonies of God. "*Give me understanding, and I shall live.*" For "*this is life eternal, that we might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*"⁷ His *testimonies* are the revelation of himself. If then we "have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things,"⁸ our knowledge of them will become more spiritual in its character, more experimental in its comforts, and more practical in its fruits. And thus, "the life of God in the soul" will invigorate us for higher attainments in evangelical knowledge, and more steady advancement in Christian holiness. But how infinitely do we live below the full privilege of knowing God in his *testimonies*! Christians of a Scriptural standard are "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded."⁹

And then—what will it be at the great consummation; when our God of love will have put his last hand to his glorious work; when the mark of all our aims—the term of all our hopes and de-

¹ Rev. xx. 11, 12.² Acts xvii. 31.³ Verses 33, 34, 73.⁴ Jer. ix. 23, 24.⁵ 1 John ii. 13, 14.⁶ John xvii. 3.⁷ 1 John ii. 20.⁸ Phil. iii. 13, 15.

sires—all that we have so long labored for—so earnestly panted after—so restlessly pursued—when all shall be attained? Then indeed we shall live a life worthy of the name—not as now under the shadowed glimmerings—but under the immediate full-eyed glory of his light and love; having escaped forever the deadliest of all dangers—sin—the very deadliness of death itself.

PART XIX.

145. *I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes.*

146. *I cried unto thee: save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.*

THIS is indeed the “pouring out of the soul before the Lord”¹—“a beautiful and encouraging picture of a soul wrestling with God in a few short sentences, with as much power and success as in the most continued length of supplication. Brief as are the petitions, the whole compass of language could not make them more comprehensive. “*Hear me.*” *The whole heart* is engaged in the “*cry.*” “*Save me,*” includes a sinner’s whole need—pardon, acceptance, access, holiness, strength, comfort, heaven, all in one word—Christ. *Save me*—from self, from Satan, from the world, from the curse of sin, from the wrath of God. This is the need of every moment to the end. “*I cried unto thee*”—What a mercy to know where to go! The way of access must have been implied—though *not mentioned*—in these short ejaculations. “*Hear me*”—must have been in the name of the all-prevailing Advocate. “*Save me*”—through him, whose name is, Jesus the Saviour. A moment’s interruption of our view of Jesus casts, *for the time*, an impenetrable cloud over our way to God, and paralyzes the spirit of prayer. Prayer is not only the sense of guilt, and the cry for mercy, but the exercise of faith. When I come to God, I would always bring with me the blood of Christ—my price—my plea in my hand. He cannot cast it out. Thus am I “a prince, that hath power with God and prevail.”² Here is the warrant to believe, that my God does, and will *hear me*. Here is my encouragement to “look up”³—to be “watching at his gate”⁴—like the cripple at the “beautiful gate of the temple—expecting to receive somewhat of him.”⁵ Not a word of *such* prayer is lost. It is as seed—not cast into the earth, exposed to hazard and loss⁶—but cast into the bosom of God—and here—as in the natural harvest, “*he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*”⁷ The most frequent comers are the largest re-

¹ 1 Sam. i. 15.

² Gen. xxxii. 28.

³ Psalm v. 3.

⁴ Prov. viii. 34.

⁵ Acts iii. 5.

⁶ Matt. xiii. 3–7.

⁷ 2 Cor. ix. 6.

ceivers—always wanting—always asking—living upon what they have, but still hungering for more.

With many, however, the ceremony of prayer is everything, without any thought, desire, anxiety, or waiting for an answer. These slight dealings prove low thoughts of God, and deep and guilty insensibility;—that the sense of pressing need is not sharp enough to put an edge upon the affections. But are none of God's dear children, too, who in days past never missed the presence of God, but they "sought it carefully with tears"—now too easily satisfied with the act of prayer, without this "great object of it—the enjoyment of God?"¹ Perhaps you lament your deficiencies, your weakness in the hour of temptation, your indulgence of ease, your unfaithfulness of heart. But is your "cry" continually ascending "with your whole heart?" Your soul would not be so empty of comfort, if your mouth were not so empty of prayer. The Lord never charges presumption upon the frequency or extent of your supplications; but he is often ready to "upbraid you with your unbelief;"² that you are so reluctant in your approach, and so straitened in your desires—that you are so unready to receive what he is so ready to give—that your vessels are too narrow to take in his full blessing—that you are content with drops, when he has promised "floods,"—yea "rivers of living water,"³—and above all, that you are so negligent in praising him for what you have already received.

We must not lightly give up our suit. We must not be content with keeping up duty, without keeping up "continued instancy in prayer"⁴ in our duty. This alone preserves in temptation. Satan strikes at all of God in the soul. Unbelief readily yields to his suggestions. This is the element in which we live—the warfare of every moment. Will then the customary devotion of morning and evening (*even supposing it to be sincere*) suffice for such an emergency? No. The Christian must "put on the whole armor of God;" and buckle on his panoply with unceasing "prayer and watchfulness in the Spirit."⁵ If his heart be dead and cold, let him rather cry and wait, (as Luther was used to do,) till it was warm and enlivened. The hypocrite, indeed, would be satisfied with the barren performance of the duty. But the child of God, while he mourns in the dust, "Behold I am vile!"⁶—still holds on, though

¹ 'The great object of prayer should constantly be the enjoyment of God; and however inadequate the believer's conceptions may be, yet he has a distinct idea of his object; so distinct that you can never impose upon a real saint by offering him something else in the room of it. He knows what he wants; and he knows that this or that is not the thing which he wants.—Augustine, Epistle 121.

In the same Epistle he very judiciously recommends the use of short and quick ejaculations, (like these under consideration,) rather than long protracted supplications, unless the mind be in a fervent frame; in which case the petitions, as he justly observes, may be indefinitely prolonged, without incurring the censure implied in Matthew vi. 7.

² Mark xvi. 14.

³ Isaiah xlv. 3. John vii. 38.

⁴ Rom. xii. 12.

⁵ Eph. vi. 13—18. 'The violence of temptation stupefies me,' said Luther on one occasion, speaking of his own experience, 'that I cannot open my mouth. As soon as ever it pleases God that I can lift up my heart in prayer, and make use of Scriptural expressions, it ceases to prevail.'—Milner, vol. v. p. 431.

⁶ Job xl. 4; also xlii. 5, 6.

sometimes with a *cry*, that probably finds no utterance with his lips;¹ that vents itself only with tears, or “groanings that cannot be uttered.”² And shall such a *cry* fail to “enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth?” “*The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping. Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee.*”³

But why is the believer so earnest for an audience?—why so restless in his cries for salvation? Is it not, that he loves “*the statutes*” of his God; that he is grieved on account of his inability to keep them; and that he longs for mercy, as the spring of his obedience? “*Hear me; I will keep thy statutes. Save me; and I shall keep thy testimonies*”—a most satisfactory evidence of an upright heart. Sin can have no fellowship with *the statutes*. As saved sinners, they are *our delight*.

Lord! thou knowest how our hearts draw back from the spiritual work of prayer; and how we nourish our unbelief by our distance from thee. Oh pour upon us this “Spirit of grace and supplication.” “Teach us to pray”⁴—even our hearts—“*our whole hearts*”—to “*cry unto thee.*” Give us the privilege of real communion with thee—the only satisfying joy of earth or heaven. Then shall we “run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge our hearts.”⁵

147. *I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.*

148. *Mine eyes prevent the night-watches, that I might meditate in thy word.*

THE Psalmist here brings before us not only the fervency, but the seasons, of his supplication. Like Daniel he had set times of prayer—“three times a day.”⁶ Yet did not this frequent exercise satisfy him, without an habitual “waiting all the day upon his God.”⁷ Prayer was indeed his meat, and drink, and breath. “*I give myself unto prayer.*”⁸ His sketch of the “blessed man, delighting in the law of his God, and”—as an evidence of this delight—“meditating therein day and night”⁹—unconsciously furnished an accurate picture of himself. For early and late was he found in the work of God; “*preventing the dawning of the morning*” for prayer, and again, “*the night-watches, that he might meditate in the word.*” But to look above the example of David to David’s Lord; surely “it was written” most peculiarly “for our learning,” that Jesus—after a laborious Sabbath—every moment of which appears to have been spent for the benefit of sinners; and when his body, subject to the same infirmities, and therefore needing the same refreshment with our own, seemed to require repose—“*in the morning, rising up a great while before day, went out, and departed into a solitary place and there prayed.*”¹⁰ On another oc-

¹ Exodus xiv. 15. 1 Sam. i. 13. Neh. ii. 4.

² Rom. viii. 26.

³ Psalm vi. 8; xxxviii. 9.

⁴ Luke xi. 1.

⁵ Verse 32.

⁶ Psalm lv. 17, with Daniel vi. 10.

⁷ Psalm xxv. 5.

⁸ Ib. cix. 4. ‘But I prayer,’ Heb.—all over prayer—always ready for prayer—at all seasons, besides the frequency of set times of communion—one whose life is a continual prayer—“prayer without ceasing.”

⁹ 1 Thess. v. 17.

¹⁰ Ib. i. 2.

¹¹ Mark i. 21—35.

casion, when intensely engaged in the service of his Church, and about to lay her foundation in the choice of her first ministers, *did his eyes prevent the night-watches*. "He continued all night in prayer to God."¹

So long as *the duty only* of prayer is known, we shall be content with our set seasons. But when *the privilege* is felt, we shall be early at work, following it closely morning and night.² While, however, family and social exercises are refreshing—while the tabernacles of the Lord are amiable in our view, and we delight to "wait at the posts of his doors,"³ yet it is the lonely, confidential intercourse with our God—"the door shut"—the Church as well as the world excluded—that makes our closest walk with God.⁴ *Secret prayer is most likely to be true prayer. There is no true prayer without it.* It was the "garden" prayer—separate even from his own disciples—that brought special support to the fainting humanity of Jesus.⁵ And if he needed this perfect retirement, whose affections were always fixed upon their centre, what must be our own need, whose desires are so unstable and languishing! And how cheering is his succoring sympathy, knowing as he does experimentally the heart of a secret, earnest pleader! Such doubtless were David's *cries*—penetrating no ear, but his Father's—yet delightful incense there.⁶

But to see the King of Israel, with all his urgent responsibilities, "sanctifying" such frequent daily seasons "with the word of God and prayer"—how does it expose the insincerity of the worldling's excuse, that the pressing avocations of the day afford no time for the service of God! It is not, that such men are busy, and have no time for prayer; but that they are worldly, and have no heart to pray. The consecrated heart will always find time for secret duties, and will rather, as David, redeem it from sleep, than lose it from prayer.⁷

And does not the uniform experience of the Lord's people warrant the remark—how much our vital spirituality depends upon the daily consecration of *the first fruits of our time* to the Lord? How often are opportunities for heavenly communion during the day unavoidably straitened! But "*the night watches*" and "*the dawning of the morning*" afford seasons free from interruption, when our God expects to hear from us, and when "the joy" of "fellowship with him" will be "our strength"⁸ for active service, and our keep-

¹ Luke vi. 12—16.

² Psalm v. 3; lxxxviii. 13. Isaiah xxvi. 9.

³ Psalm lxxxiv. 1. Prov. viii. 34.

⁴ Matt. vi. 6.

⁵ Luke xxii. 41—43.

⁶ Psalm lvi. 8; cxli. 2. Prov. xv. 8. Cant. ii. 14.

⁷ Most instructive is the example of Mr. Cadogan, as recorded by his admirable biographer. "Feeling strongly that he must walk with God in secret at any rate; when he had company, he would often retire from them into his study, rather than omit his accustomed waiting upon his God. Often has he been found there, when most of the family were gone to rest, surprised on his knees by the domestic who usually took care of the house."—*Cecil's Life of Cadogan*.

Perhaps in an observation once made to an excellent minister, the importance of the truth may furnish an apology for the quaintness of the dress:—"If you did not plough in the closet, you would not reap in the pulpit."

⁸ Neh. viii. 10.

ing from many a worldly snare. What a standard of enjoyment would it be, with our last thoughts in *the night watches*, to leave as it were our hearts with him, and to find them with him in the morning, awaking as with our hearts in heaven! Surely the refreshments of our visits to him, and his abidance with us, will often constrain us to acknowledge—"Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."¹ The thoughts of God were clearly the first visitors to David's waking mind;² and to this may be ascribed his habitual success in realizing his presence throughout the day. Our lukewarmness and our want of spiritual enjoyment may often be traced to that morning indolence (which the zeal of the ungodly³ might put to shame) which not only throws the business of the day into confusion, but also consumes the time in self-indulgence or trifling, which should have been given to sacred intercourse. For—not to speak of the seasonableness of the early hours for devotion—the very exertion made to overcome "this lust of the flesh," and to steal a march upon the demands of the world, is an exercise of self-denial, honorable to God, "that shall in no wise lose its reward." No remembrance of the past will be so refreshing at a dying hour, as the time redeemed for communion with God.

And, even should there be no actual enjoyment, at least let us honor God by expectancy. "*I hoped in thy word!*"⁴ There can be no exercise of faith in the neglect of prayer; but the ground of faith, and that which gives to it life, hope, and joy, is the view of God in his word as a *promising God*. Therefore when his Providence opens no present encouragement, let us seek it in his covenant. To "*hope in his word*" is to build up ourselves upon our most holy faith,⁵ and to lay all our desires, all our cares, all our weights, and burdens, upon a solid unsinking foundation.

Well, therefore, were David's "*night-watches*" employed in "*meditation in the word.*" For, in order to stay ourselves upon it in time of need, it must occupy our whole study, thought, and love.

¹ 1 John i. 3. ² See Ps. cxxxix. 17, 18. ³ Exod. xxxii. 6. Isa. v. 11. Mic. ii. 1.

⁴ One of Melancthon's correspondents describes Luther thus:—"I cannot enough admire the extraordinary cheerfulness, constancy, faith, and hope of the man in these trying and vexatious times. He constantly feeds these gracious affections by a very diligent study of the word of God. Then not a day passes in which he does not employ in prayer at least three of his very best hours. Once I happened to hear him at prayer. Gracious God! what spirit and what faith is there in his expressions! He petitioned God with as much reverence, as if he was in the divine presence; and yet with as firm a hope and confidence, as he would address a father or a friend. 'I know,' said he, 'thou art our Father and our God; and therefore I am sure thou wilt bring to nought the persecutors of thy children. For shouldst thou fail to do this, thine own cause being connected with ours, would be endangered. It is entirely thine own concern. We, by thy providence, have been compelled to take a part. Thou therefore wilt be our defence.' Whilst I was listening to Luther praying in this manner, at a distance, my soul seemed on fire within me, to hear the man address God so like a friend, and yet with so much gravity and reverence; and also to hear him, in the course of his prayer, insisting upon the promises contained in the Psalms, as if he were sure his petitions would be granted."—*Milner's History*, vol. v. p. 565. Again referred to in Scott's Continuation, vol. i. p. 77. Was not this an illustration of David's confidence—*I hoped in thy word?*

⁵ Jude 20.

Instability of faith arises from a want of fixed recollection of the promises of God. 'This superficial habit may suffice for times of quietness; but amid the billows of temptation we can only cast "anchor sure and steadfast" in an habitual and intelligent confidence upon the full, free, firm promise of the word. Let it therefore be the food of our meditation, and the ground of our support, when our suit seems to hang at the throne of grace without any tokens of present acceptance. Often will it lift up our fainting hands, and supply strength for fresh conflict, and the earnest of blessed victory. The ground is always sure for faith. May the Lord ever furnish us with faith enough for our daily work, conflict, consolation, and establishment!

149. *Hear my voice according unto thy loving-kindness; O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment.*

In the eyes of the world, David appeared "in all his glory," when seated on his throne, and surrounded with the magnificence of his kingdom. But never did he appear so glorious in the sight of God, as when presenting himself as a suppliant before the mercy-seat, seeking an audience of the King of kings, only to send up reiterated cries for quickening grace. And do not I need the same grace every moment, in every duty? Does not "the gift of God within me" need to be daily "stirred up?"¹ Are not "the things that remain" often "ready to die?"² Then "*Hear my voice, O Lord; quicken me.*"

But to urge my suit successfully, I must "order my cause before God;" I must "fill my mouth with arguments."³ And if I can draw a favorable plea from the character of my judge—if I can prove that promises have been made in my behalf, these will be most encouraging earnest of a successful issue. Now David had been so used to plead in cases of extremity, that arguments suited to his present distress were always ready at hand. He now pleads with God for *quicken*ing grace, on the ground of his own *loving-kindness and judgment*. Can he "deny himself?"

And with what "full assurance of faith,"⁴ may I ask to be *heard* on account of that transcendent proof of "*loving-kindness*" manifested in the gift of God's dear Son⁵—not only as his chiefest mercy, but as the pledge of every other mercy⁶—and manifested too at the fittest time⁷—"according to his judgment"—after the inefficiency of the power of reason⁸ and the sanctions of the law⁹ to influence the heart, had been most clearly displayed! And what a plea is it to ask for *quicken*ing influences, that this is the very end for which this gift of *loving-kindness* was vouchsafed,¹⁰ and that the gift itself is the channel, through which the quickening life of the Godhead is imparted!¹¹ Could I ask for this grace on any other ground than *loving-kindness*? All ground of fitness or merit is swept away.¹²

¹ 2 Tim. i. 6.

² Rev. iii. 2.

³ Job xxiii. 4.

⁴ Heb. x. 22.

⁵ John iii. 16.

⁶ See Rom. viii. 32.

⁷ See Gal. iv. 4.

⁸ Comp. 1 Cor. i. 21.

⁹ Comp. Jer. xxxi. 31—33.

¹⁰ John x. 10.

¹¹ 1 John iv. 9.

¹² 1 John v. 11.

¹² Ezek. xxxvi. 32.

On the footing of mercy alone can I stand before him.¹ And how is my faith enlivened in retracing the records of my soul from the beginning—how he “betrothed”²—how he “drew me with *loving-kindness*!”³ May I not then cry, “Oh! continue *thy loving-kindness*?”⁴ And not less full is my conviction of his *judgment*, in dealing wisely and tenderly with me, according to his infallible perception of my need. Left to my own judgment—often should I have prayed myself into evil, and asked what it would have been my curse to have received.⁵ But I have learned, that the child must not be guided by his own will, but by his father’s better mind—nor the patient by his own humor, but by the physician’s skill. Truly, even the Lord’s corrections have been in *judgment*!⁶ And in the thankful remembrance of them my confidence for the time to come is established! Gladly will I “set to my seal,” that “*the Lord is a God of judgment*,” and that “*blessed are they that wait for him*.”⁷ He knows not only what grace is needed, but at what time. Not a moment sooner will it come; not a moment later will it be delayed. ‘As thou wilt, what thou wilt, when thou wilt,’⁸—is the expression of faith and resignation, with which all must be committed to the Lord, waiting for the end, in humility, desire, expectation. And if in pleading my suit for an hearing “*according to his loving-kindness*” my poor, polluted, lifeless petitions should find no liberty of approach; may I be but enabled to direct one believing look to “the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne!”⁹ and I will not doubt that my feeblest offering shall come up as a memorial before God.

150. *They draw nigh that follow after mischief; they are far from thy law.*

151. *Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth.*

THE imminent danger in which David was living¹⁰ quickened his cries to his God. Often does the Lord permit this pressing trial. Seldom—but in extremity—are our graces brought to their full exercise. Confidence is then shaken from man, and established in God.¹¹ For now it is that we enjoy our God as “a very present help in trouble,”¹² and our dependence on his “*commandments*” is a “*true*” and solid foundation of comfort to our soul. An awful character indeed is it of the ungodly. “*They are far from God’s law*”—and that not from ignorance, but from wilful enmity. This is God’s witness against them;¹³ and they are not ashamed to consent, that “this witness is true.” No wonder, therefore, that those that “*are far from God’s law*” should “*draw nigh to follow after mischief*.”¹⁴ But if “*they draw nigh*,” the Lord is nearer still. “*I*

¹ Eph. ii. 7. Titus iii. 4. ² Hosea ii. 19. ³ Jer. xxxi. 3. ⁴ Psalm xxxvi. 10.

⁵ Ib. cvi. 15. ⁶ Jer. x. 24. ⁷ Isaiah xxx. 18.

⁸ Thomas à Kempis.

⁹ Rev. v. 6.

¹⁰ Psalm lvii. 4.

¹¹ 2 Cor. i. 9.

¹² Psalm xlv. 1.

¹³ Ib. l. 17. Comp. Prov. i. 22, 25, 29.

¹⁴ ‘He cannot brook the child that hateth the father; he cannot mind the servant that careth not for the master. If ye were of the world, the world would love you; ye should dwell quietly. There would be no grief, no molestation, if the devil dwelt in you, (which God forbid.) He would not stir up his knights to besiege your house . . . but because Christ dwelleth in you, (as he does by faith,) therefore stirreth he up his first-begotten

am thy shield”—saith he to his distressed child—who echoes back the promise in the cheerfulness of faith, “*Thou art my hiding-place, and my shield : and I hope in thy word.*”² Elisha knew the power of this shield, when he quelled the alarm of his terrified servant. He beheld them “*draw nigh that follow after mischief,*” but the eye of faith assured his heart ; and when “the Lord opened the eyes of the young man,” he too was enabled to testify, “*Thou art near, O Lord !*”³

But near as the Lord is to his people as their outward shield, is he not yet nearer still, as dwelling in their hearts ? Here is “his temple,”⁴ his desired habitation—like Zion of old, of which he said, —“This is my rest forever ; here will I dwell, for I have desired it.”⁵ This is the dwelling, which, once possessed of its Divine Inhabitant, will never be left desolate.

Our spiritual enemies, like David’s persecutors, are ever present and active. The devouring “lion,”⁶ or the insinuating “serpent,”⁷ is “*nigh to follow after mischief,*” and so much the more dangerous, as his approaches are invisible. Nigh also is a tempting, ensnaring world ; and nearer still a lurking world within, separating us from communion with our God. But in turning habitually and immediately to our strong hold, we can enjoy the confidence, “*Thou art near, O Lord.*” Though “the High and Lofty One, whose name is holy ;”⁸ though the just and terrible God, yet art thou made nigh to thy people,⁹ and they to thee,¹⁰ “by the blood of the Cross.” And thou dost manifest thy presence to them in “the Son of thy love.”

Indeed to the Son himself, the nearness of his Father’s presence was a source of consolation and support, when “*they drew nigh, that followed after mischief.*” “*He is near,*” said he—“*which justifieth me : who will contend with me ? let us stand together. Who is mine adversary ? let him come near to me. Behold the Lord God will help me ; who is he that shall condemn me ? So they all shall wax old as doth a garment : the moth shall eat them up.*”¹¹ “Behold,” said he to his affrighted disciples, as his hour drew near, “*the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered every one to his own, and shall leave me alone : and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*”¹² And thus his people in earthly desolation flee to the promises of their God ; and in the recollection of his faithful, ever-present help, “set to

son, the world, to seek how to disquiet you, to rob you, to despoil you, to destroy ; and perchance your dear Father, to try to make known to you and to the world, that ye are destinate to another dwelling than here on earth, to another city than man’s eyes have seen at any time, hath given, or will give power to Satan or to the world to take from you the things which he hath lent you ; and by taking away, to try your fidelity, obedience, and love towards him, (for ye may not love them above him,) as by giving that ye have, and keeping it, he hath declared his love towards you.³—*Bradford’s Epistles—Fathers of the English Church*, vol. vi. pp. 58, 59.

¹ Gen. xv. 1.

² Verse 114.

³ Comp. 2 Kings vi. 14—17.

⁴ 2 Cor. vi. 16.

⁵ Psalm cxxxii. 13, 14, with Eph. ii. 22.

⁶ 1 Peter v. 8.

⁷ Rev. xii. 9.

⁸ Isaiah lvii. 15.

⁹ Col. i. 20.

¹⁰ Eph. ii. 13.

¹¹ Isaiah l. 8, 9.

¹² John xvi. 32.

their seal," that "*all his commandments are truth.*" The mischief intended for them only proves, that "Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favor wilt thou compass him as with a shield."¹

But may the Lord not only be brought *near* in our interest in him, but may we be kept *near* in communion with him! Let our hearts be sacred to him. Let us be most careful to watch against any strangeness with this beloved Friend, and to cultivate a drawing cordiality and closeness in our walk with him. If our character is formed by the society in which we live, what "treasures of wisdom and knowledge" should we find, what a spirit of unbounded love should we imbibe—by a nearer and more constant intercourse with him; willing as he is to impart himself freely, inexhaustibly unto us! In a backsliding state, we must expect to lose this heavenly *nearness*.² In a state of darkness, it is the exercise of faith, to believe that unseen he is *near*; and the practical influence of faith will lead us to speak, and pray, and think, and praise, as "seeing him who is invisible."³ In a state of enjoyment, let us anticipate the time, when he will be ever *near* to us.

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."⁴

152. *Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.*

THE *truth of the commandments*, which the Psalmist had just asserted, was an *everlasting foundation*. He stated it not upon slight conviction. But he *knew it*—and that not recently—but as the result of early consideration—he *had known it of old*. It is most important to have a full certainty of the grounds of our faith. How else can we have that "good thing—a heart established with grace?"⁵—how "continue in the faith grounded and settled?"—how "kept from being moved away from the hopes of the Gospel?"⁶ Praised be God! We feel our ground to be firm. As God is the same, so must *his testimonies* be.⁷ We cannot conceive of his promising without performance, or threatening without effect.⁸ They are therefore expressly revealed as a firm foundation, in express contrast with this world's fairest promise.⁹

But let us mark this eternal basis of "*the testimonies.*" The whole plan of redemption was emphatically "*founded forever.*" The Saviour "was *foreordained before the foundation of the world.*"¹⁰ The people of God are "*chosen in Christ before the world began!*"¹¹ The great Author "*declares the end from the beginning,*"¹² and thus clears his dispensations from any charge of mutability or contingency. Every event in the Church is fixed, permitted, and provided for—not in the passing moment of time, but

¹ Psalm v. 12.

² Cant. v. 2—6.

³ Heb. xi. 27.

⁴ Rev. xxi. 3.

⁵ Heb. xiii. 9.

⁶ Col. i. 23.

⁷ Ps. lxxxix. 34; cxi. 7—9.

⁸ Numb. xxiii. 19.

⁹ Isaiah xl. 1—8.

¹⁰ 1 Peter i. 20. Comp. Rev. xiii. 8.

¹¹ Eph. i. 4. 2 Tim. i. 9.

¹² Isaiah xlvi. 9, 10.

in the counsels of eternity. All God's faithful engagements with his people of old are "*founded forever*" upon the oath and promise of God—the two "immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie."¹ May we not then "have strong consolation" in venturing every hope for eternity upon this rock? nor need we be dismayed to see all our earthly stays, "the world, and the lust, and the fashion of it—passing away" before us.² Yet we are most of us strangely attached to this fleeting scene, even when experience and divine teaching have instructed us in its vanity: and it is not until repeated proofs of this truth have touched us very closely, in the destruction of our dearest consolations, that we take the full comfort of the enduring foundation of God's "*testimonies*," and of the imperishable character of their treasure.

Now let me realize the special support of this view in a dying hour, 'I am on the borders of an unknown world,' but "my hope that maketh not ashamed,"³ at this moment of peril is as "an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast;" and in the strength of it I do not fear to plunge into eternity. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."⁴ I know—not his sufficiency merely, but his *All-sufficiency*. I know his conquering power over the great enemies of my soul. I know that he has "spoiled the principalities and powers"⁵ of hell, of the strength to triumph over his ransomed people. I know also, that he is "the Lord; he changeth not;"⁶ his word changes not: his testimonies abide the same: "*I have known of old, that he has founded them forever.*" Thus we look for the removing of those "things which are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."⁷ The scoffer may say,—“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do!”⁸ Let God himself give the answer—“*Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner; but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.*”⁹

¹ Heb. vi. 16—18.

⁴ 2 Tim. i. 12.

⁷ Heb. xii. 27.

² 1 John ii. 17. 1 Cor. vii. 31.

⁵ Col. ii. 15.

⁸ Psalm xi. 3.

³ Rom. v. 5.

⁶ Mal. iii. 6.

⁹ Isaiah li. 6.

PART XX.

153. *Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law.*

ANOTHER note of the child of sorrow! Hated by the world¹—vexed by his restless enemy²—chastened by his God³—burdened with his “body of death,”⁴—what else can he do but cry, *Consider my affliction?* How manifestly is this world not our rest, but our exercise for rest! Well is it that our “days are few,” when they are so “evil.”⁵ But how could we hold on as we do—had we not our Saviour’s pitying heart and Almighty help? The want of this sympathy was the overwhelming sorrow, that well nigh “broke his” sorrowing “heart”—“*I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.*”⁶ This depth of trial combined with every other part of his unknown sufferings to make him “*such an High Priest as became us,*”⁷ “*touched with the feeling of our infirmities;*”⁸ “*considering our afflictions:*” and “*in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.*”⁹ With what sympathy did he “*consider the affliction*” of his people in Egypt! “*I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and I know their sorrows.*”¹⁰ At a subsequent period, “*his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel*”¹¹—a cheering example of that compassionate interest, with which, “*in all his people’s afflictions he is afflicted.*”¹² Well may his people take encouragement to pray, “*Consider mine affliction.*” “*Now, therefore, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us.*”¹³

Yet is he not only sympathizing to *consider*, but mighty to *deliver*. “*Who is this glorious*” conqueror with his “*dyed garments*” of victory—“*travailing in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness—mighty to save.*”¹⁴ Such did the noble confessors in Babylon¹⁵—such did Daniel in the den of lions¹⁶—find him, fully justifying their unwavering confidence in his love and power. And what age of the Church has been wanting in testimony, that “*the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations,*”¹⁷ and that “*he that hath delivered, doth deliver, and will even to the end deliver?*”¹⁸ The consciousness that “*we do not forget his law,*” is our plea, that he would “*consider our affliction and deliver*” us;¹⁹ and is of itself an evidence, that the affliction has performed its appointed work. Let me then expect in mine affliction the fulfilment of his gracious promise, “*Because he hath set*

¹ John xv. 19.

² Job i. 7. Luke xxii. 31. 1 Peter v. 8.

³ 1 Cor. xi. 32. Heb. xii. 10, 11.

⁴ Rom. vii. 24; viii. 23.

⁵ Gen. xlvii. 9.

⁶ Psalm lxix. 20. Comp. xxii. 11.

⁷ Heb. vii. 26.

⁸ Ib. iv. 15.

⁹ Ib. ii. 18.

¹⁰ Exod. iii. 7; also ii. 25.

¹¹ Judges x. 16.

¹² Isaiah lxiii. 9.

¹³ Neh. ix. 32. Comp. Psalm cxxxii. 1.

¹⁴ Isaiah lxiii. 1.

¹⁵ Dan. iii. 17, 25—28.

¹⁶ Ib. vi. 23, 27.

¹⁷ 2 Peter ii. 9.

¹⁸ 2 Cor. i. 10.

¹⁹ The same plea is often urged in this Psalm, verses 94, 173, 176.

his love upon me, therefore *will I deliver him*; I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and *I will deliver him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.*"¹ In the midst of my trials I would prepare my hymn of praise for his kind *consideration* and faithful *deliverance*—"I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast *considered my trouble*; thou hast known my soul in adversities, and hast not shut me up in the hand of the enemy; thou hast set my feet in a large room!"² Let me then remember my *affliction*, only as it may be the means of increasing my acquaintance with my tender and Almighty Friend. Poor and afflicted as I may be, let me be more poor and afflicted still, if I may but have fresh evidence that he "thinketh upon me"³—that he "*considers my affliction*," and in his own gracious time and way will "*deliver me.*"

154. *Plead my cause, and deliver me; quicken me according to thy word.*

OPPRESSED as the Psalmist appeared to be by the weight of his *affliction*, he is at no loss where to apply for help. He carries his righteous cause to him, who "stilleth the enemy and the avenger"⁴—"Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me; say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."⁵ Thus must we throughout our warfare maintain "the patience of hope,"⁶ waiting for the Lord, "until he plead our cause, and execute judgment for us."⁷ If there is an accuser to resist,⁸ "*we have an Advocate*" to *plead*,⁹ who could testify of his prevailing acceptance in the court of heaven, "Father, I thank thee, that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always."¹⁰ Our Redeemer does indeed "*plead our cause*" successfully for our "*deliverance*;" when but for his powerful advocacy we must have stood speechless in the judgment—helpless, without any prospect of acceptance. Awful indeed was the cause which he had to manage. Our adversary had the law on his side. We could not deny the charge, or offer satisfaction. We could neither "stand in the judgment," nor flee from the impending wrath. But at that moment of infinite peril, our cause was pleaded by a "Counsellor"¹¹ who never was nonsuited in court, who brought irresistible pleas, and produced satisfaction that could not be denied. The voice of *deliverance* was heard in heaven—"Deliver them from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom."¹² This ransom is no less than the price of his own "precious blood," "shed for many for the remission of sins"¹³—a ransom, which has merited and obtained eternal "*deliverance*"¹⁴ for his people, and which still pleads for the

¹ Psalm xci. 14, 15.

² Psalm xxxi. 7, 8.

³ Ib. xl. 17.

⁴ Ib. viii. 2.

⁵ Ib. xxxv. 1—3.

⁶ 1 Thess. i. 3.

⁷ Micah vii. 9.

⁸ Zech. iii. 1. Rev. xii. 10.

⁹ 1 John ii. 2.

¹⁰ John ix. 41, 42.

¹¹ Isaiah ix. 5.

¹² Job xxxiii. 24.

¹³ 1 Peter i. 19. Matt. xxvi. 28.

¹⁴ Heb. ix. 12.

expiation of the guilt, which attaches to their holiest services, and defiles their happiest approaches to their God. When, therefore, Satan accuses me: yea, when my own heart condemns me, I may look upward to my heavenly Advocate—“*Plead my cause and deliver me.*”¹ “O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me. Thou wilt answer, O Lord, my God.”²

Poor trembling sinner! take courage. “Your Redeemer is mighty—he will thoroughly plead your cause,”³ and leave no charge unanswered. But you say, ‘How know I that he speaks for me?’ Yet if not for you, for whom does he speak? Who needs an advocate more than you? He pleads indeed nothing favorable of you; but much, very much, for you. For he pleads the merit of his own blood, “that taketh away the sin of the world”⁴—even that great sin of “unbelief,” of which his Spirit is now “convincing”⁵ you; and which you are now made to feel, lament, and resist, as the bitterest foe to your peace. And does he not “ever live to make intercession for you?” Why then hesitate to apply the certain and consoling inference, that “he is able to save to the uttermost?”⁶ Why discouraged by the sight of sin, temptation, backsliding, difficulty, and fear, arising before you on every side; when, after you have taken the most extended view of the prospect of sorrow, this one word “*uttermost*” goes beyond it? If you feel it hard to believe, send up your cry—“Help thou mine unbelief.”⁷ Only do not dishonor him by wilful despondency; and do not add the sin of disobedience, in delaying this moment to come to him.

After all, however, even while exercising faith in our heavenly Advocate, we must mourn our sluggishness in his service. Well, therefore, do we accompany our pleading for *deliverance* with the supplication—“*Quicken me.*” Every moment’s perseverance depends upon this Divine supply. Blessed be God for the sure warrant of expectation—“*According to thy word!*” Here we shall receive not only the living principle, but its lively operation; not only the fire to kindle the lamp, but the oil to feed the flame. For he that is our Advocate to “*plead*” for us, and our Saviour to “*deliver*” us, is also our *quicken*ing Head, filled with “the residue of the Spirit” to “revive his work.” Thou “*hast ascended on high, and hast received gifts for men: yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.*”⁸ Do we therefore want a heart to pray, to praise, to believe, to love? Let us only look to an ascended Saviour, sending down the life-giving influence from

¹ ‘The word translated “*deliver me,*” is taken from the office of a redeemer or next of kin amongst the Israelites, to whom it belonged to redeem the inheritance, or ransom the person, of his impoverished or enslaved relative; and also to be his patron and defender against injustice and oppression, and the avenger of his blood, if he was slain.’—*Scott*. The use therefore of this word in the original, in this verse, naturally points the believer’s attention to him, who is indeed near of kin to him, and has combined all the offices of the ancient redeemer in his one beloved person; and therefore at once illustrates and warrants the view that is here given of the passage.

² Isaiah xxxviii. 14. ³ Psalm xxxviii. 15. ⁴ Margin and P. T.

⁴ John i. 29.

⁵ Ib. xvi. 8, 9.

⁶ Hebrews vii. 25.

⁷ Jer. l. 34.

⁸ Mark ix. 24.

⁸ Psalm lxxviii. 18.

above, as the purchase of his blood, the fruit of his intercession; and our hope will be enlivened, our faith established, and the graces of the Spirit will abound to the glory of our God.

155. *Salvation is far from the wicked; for they seek not thy statutes.*

How striking the contrast!—how awfully destitute the condition! They have no one to *consider their affliction*—no one to *deliver them*—no one to *plead their cause*. Indeed, all the misery that an immortal soul is capable of enduring throughout eternity is included in this sentence—“*Salvation is far from the wicked.*” The full picture of it is drawn by our Lord himself, “The rich man died and was buried; and *in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*”¹ The present enjoyment of “*salvation*” is “*far from the wicked.*” “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”² Their common employments are “*sin.*”³ Their “*sacrifice is an abomination.*” Their life is “*without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world.*”⁴ But who can tell the curse of eternity, with this “*salvation far from them?*” To be eternally shut out from God—from heaven! To be eternally shut in with the enemies of God, and the heirs of hell! Fellow-christians—look from what ye have escaped—what ye were, when “ye were sometimes afar off”—what ye would have been now and forever, had ye not “in Christ Jesus been made nigh by the blood of Christ:”⁵ and then “if you hold your peace, the stones will immediately cry out” against you.⁶

But whence this inexpressibly awful condition of “*the wicked?*” Is not “*salvation*” offered to them? Are they shut out from hope, and sternly refused an interest in the covenant? Oh! no; it is their own doing, or rather their own undoing. Would they but *seek* the ways of God, they might plead for *deliverance*; yea, they might have a prevailing Advocate to *plead their cause, and deliver them*. But now *salvation* is far from them, because “*they are far from God’s law.*”⁷ It does not fly from them—but they fly from it. Every act is a stride of mind, more or less vigorous in departure from God. Nay—such is their pride, that “they will *not even seek his statutes.*”⁸ They “desire not the knowledge of his ways. They say to God—“Depart from us;”⁹ God therefore will say to them, “Depart from me.”¹⁰ They say to Christ, “We will not have this man to reign over us;” He will say of them, “Those mine enemies, that would not I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.”¹¹ It is not then so much God that punishes them, as they that punish themselves. Their own sin—the necessity of the case—punishes them. They “will not come to Christ,

¹ Luke xvi. 22, 23, 26.

² Isaiah lvii. 21.

³ Prov. xxi. 4.

⁴ Ib. xv. 8.

⁵ Eph. ii. 12.

⁶ Eph. ii. 13.

⁷ Luke xix. 40.

⁸ Psalm lxxiii. 27.

⁹ Ib. x. 4.

¹⁰ Job xxi. 14.

¹¹ Matt. vii. 23; xxv. 41.

¹² Luke xix. 18, 27.

that they might have life :”¹ “so that they are without excuse” —die they must.²

But who are “*the wicked* ?” Alas ! this is a melancholy question, as involving within its sphere so much that passes for amiable, virtuous, and lovely, in the estimation of the world. Not to speak of those, whose name is broadly written upon their foreheads ; it includes “all that forget God,”³ however blameless their moral character, or their external Christian profession. It is determined upon immutable authority—it is the decree of our eternal Judge—“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his ;”⁴ and if none of his, then it follows in unavoidable consequence, that “*salvation is far from him.*”

Oh ! could we but persuade such of their awful state. Oh ! could we awake them from their death-like—deadly sleep—slumbering on the brink of ruin ! on the borders of hell ! But they are impaled in their own self-esteem, or in the favorable comparison drawn between themselves and many around them ; forgetting that the rule, by which they will be judged, is not the world’s standard of moral rectitude, but the statutes of a holy, heart-searching God ; forgetting too, that all may be decency without, while all is corruption within. Let them test their hearts by an honest and prayerful scrutiny of *the statutes* ; and while they must confess themselves guilty before God, a sense of danger would awaken the hearty cry for salvation⁵ which would not *then* “*be far from them.*”⁶ For “the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him ; he will also hear their cry, and *will save them.*”⁷

O thou Almighty Spirit, whose power is alone able to “turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,”⁸ “raise up thy power, and come among us ;” “rend the heavens, and come down ;”⁹ rend the hearts of sinners, of the ungodly, the moral, the naturally amiable, the self-righteous. “Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek thy name, O Lord.”¹⁰

156. *Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord ; quicken me according to thy judgments.*

It is most cheering to pass from judgment to mercy—from the awful state of *the wicked*, to *adore the mercies of God* to his own people. We were naturally no better than they. The most eminent saved sinner looks on himself with wonder—“Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire ?”¹¹ Never will he lose the remembrance—“Who maketh thee to differ ?”¹² To mercy—rich mercy alone—we trace the distinction between those that are “quicken’d,” and those that remain “dead in trespasses and sins.”¹³

But let us mark the features of *this mercy*. *How great in ex-*

¹ John v. 40.

⁵ Acts xvi. 30.

⁸ Luke i. 17.

¹¹ Zech. iii. 2.

² Matt. xxiii. 37, 38.

⁶ See Psalm lxxxv. 9.

⁹ Isaiah lxiv. 1.

¹² 1 Cor. iv. 7.

³ Psalm ix. 17.

⁴ Romans viii. 9.

⁷ Psalm cxlv. 18, 19.

¹⁰ Psalm lxxxiii. 16.

¹³ Eph. ii. 1, 4, 5.

tent! Estimate its *greatness* by the infinite debt which it blots out¹—the eternal ruin from which it saves²—the heavenly crown to which it raises.³ Trace it to the mind of God—that first eternal purpose of *mercy*, which sets us apart for his glory.⁴ Mark it in that “time of love,” when *his mercy* rescued us from Satan, sin, death, and hell, and drew us to himself.⁵ As soon might we span the arch of heaven, as fully grasp the *greatness of his mercy*.⁶ And then how *tender* is it in its exercise! Such was the first beam of mercy that “visited us.”⁷ Such has been the continued display. So natural as from a Father.⁸ So yearning, “as one whom his mother comforteth!”⁹ Such a multitude of those *tender mercies*! The overflowing stream follows us through every step of our wilderness journey. The blessing compasses us about, abounds towards us, keeps us steadfast, or restores us when wandering, and will preserve us to the end. Happy are we—not in the general perception—not in the hearsay report¹⁰—but in the experimental enjoyment of it. “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.”¹¹ But what poor returns have we made for this infinite love? Surely the petition for *quicken*ing grace suits us well. This was the constant burden of David’s prayer. For he was not like many professors, who can maintain their assurance in a lower and careless walk. No; he was a believer of a very high standard; desirous, not only of proving his title to the blessing, but of living in its habitual and active enjoyment.

Often as this petition has been brought before us, in the course of this psalm, it is too important ever to be passed over. Let us at this time use it for the purpose of individual self-inquiry. In what respects do I need quickening grace? Are my views of sin, and especially of the sin of my own heart, slight and superficial? Do they fail in producing humility, abasement, tenderness of conscience, circumspection of conduct? If it be so, “*Quicken me, O my God!*” Does my apprehension of a Saviour’s love serve to imbitter sin to me? to crucify sin in me, to warm and enliven my heart with love to him, and zeal in his service? If I am convicted of coldness to such a Saviour, and sluggishness in such a service, I need not pray—“*O Lord, quicken me!*” And how do I find it with regard to prayer itself? Are not my prayers general—unfrequent—wandering? Is not service too often constrained, a forced duty, rather than a privilege and delight? “*O Lord, quicken me!*”

Yet many Christians, through a mistaken perception, know not when they have received the blessing. They have looked for it in strong and sensible excitement; and in defect of this they sink into despondency. Whereas the solid influence is independent of sensations, and consists in a tender sensibility of sin—spiritual appetite for the Gospel—active energy in Christian duties, and continual

¹ Isaiah xliii. 22—25; i. 18.

² Psalm lxxxvi. 13.

³ Rev. i. 5, 6.

⁴ Eph. i. 4—6.

⁵ Ezekiel xvi. 6—8.

⁶ Psalm ciii. 11. Isaiah lv. 8, 9.

⁷ Luke i. 78.

⁸ 2 Cor. i. 3. Psalm ciii. 13.

⁹ Isaiah lxvi. 13.

¹⁰ John iv. 42.

¹¹ Psalm ciii. 1—3.

progress in heavenly exercises. But under no circumstances must the evil of a dead and drooping state be lightly thought of; obscuring as it does the difference between the believer and the worldling, or at least between the believer and the formalist. O believer, you have great need to carry your complaint again and again unto the Lord: "*Quicken me—quicken me—according to thy judgments*"—according to those gracious promises, which are the method of thy proceedings, and the rule of thy dispensations of grace. You cannot be too earnest to welcome the breathings of the Spirit, or too cautious that your indolence resists not his Divine impression. When he quickens you with his influence, do you quicken him with your supplications—"*Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south: blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.*"¹ Persuade—entreat—constrain his stay. Enlivened by his energy, how happy, and in your own sphere how useful, a member of the Church of Christ you may be found! Your soul will be invigorated—your graces strengthened—and your affections elevated—in humble, cheerful, steady dependence upon the Saviour, and in daily renewed devotedness to his service. The more the spiritual life is thus "exercised unto godliness," the more delightfully will you realize the active service and everlasting praise, which will constitute the perfection of heavenly enjoyment,—"*His servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face.*"²

157. *Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.*

DAVID'S experience is common to us all. "*Many indeed are our persecutors and enemies.*" This is a solemn cost. Let those who are setting out in the Christian course count it well. From neglect of our Lord's rule of scriptural calculation,³ many seem to begin well; but they have been "hindered"⁴—they turn back; they are zealous, but inconsiderate; warm-hearted, but ignorant of themselves, their work, and their resources. They were allured at first, perhaps by an interest in the Gospel—some delusive excitement of love to the Saviour—the picture of the "paths of pleasantness and peace,"⁵ or the joys of heaven. But the cross was out of sight and out of mind. But this promise of ease and happiness was no less foolish and unwarrantable than that of a soldier, utterly forgetful of his profession, and who should promise himself peace at the very time that he was called out to the wars. Surely, if like God's ancient people, we begin our road in sunshine, it is well to be provided against the storms, which will soon overtake us.⁶ We would say therefore to all—specially to sanguine beginners—Let your course be commenced with serious consideration, and jealous self-scrutiny. Beware of hasty determinations. See to it that your resources are drawn, not from your own resolutions, or from the sincerity and ardor of your love; but from the fulness that is treas-

¹ Cant. iv. 16.

² Rev. xxii. 3, 4.

³ Luke xiv. 28—33.

⁴ Gal. v. 7; iii. 3.

⁵ Prov. iii. 17.

⁶ Exodus xv. 1; xvi. 1—3.

ured up in Jesus for your present distress. Feel every step of your way by the light of the sacred word. If you expect Christian consistency to command the esteem of an ungodly world, you have forgotten both your Master's word and example,¹ and you will soon be ready to exclaim—"Many are my persecutors and mine enemies." For if their hostility is not always active, the enmity "is not dead, but sleepeth." If, however, their unexpected surprisals and inveteracy should daunt you in the conflict, you are again forgetting the word of cheering support in the most awful crisis—"My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness."² Thus the word of God will be "the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left."³ Presumption is cast down, self-confidence is humbled, and the trembling simplicity of dependence upon an Almighty arm is upheld and honored.

Count then upon the difficulties, that beset the heavenly path. You will never pluck the Rose of Sharon, if you are afraid of being pricked with the thorns which surround it. You will never reach the crown, if you flinch from the cross in the way to it. Oh! think of the honor of bearing this cross. It is conformity to the Son of God. Let the mind be deeply imbued with the remembrance of his daily cross of suffering and reproach; and we shall gladly "go forth without the camp, bearing his reproach," yea—even "rejoicing, if we are counted worthy to suffer shame"⁴ with him and for him. Indeed what is our love, if we will not take up the cross for him? How can we be his followers without his cross?⁵ How can we be Christians, if we are not confessors of Christ before a world that despises his Gospel?

But a steady consistent profession is no matter of course. The crown is not easily won. "Many are our persecutors and our enemies." Persecution to the false professor is an occasion of apostasy;⁶ to the faithful servant of Christ, it is the trial of his faith,⁷ the source of his richest consolations,⁸ the guard of his profession,⁹ and the strength of his perseverance.¹⁰ It drives him to his God. He casts himself upon his Saviour for immediate refuge and support; and the quickening influence which he had just been seeking, enables him to say—"Yet do I not decline from thy testimonies." Thus did the great Apostle, at the time when his "persecutors were many," and human help even from his friends had failed him, maintain an unshaken confidence in the service of his God. "At my first answer"—he tells us—"no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me"¹¹ David himself often acknowledged the same principle of perseverance under similar trial—"Lord, how are they increased that trouble me? Many are they that rise up against me. Many there be, which say of my soul, There is no

¹ John xv. 20. ² 2 Cor. xii. 9. ³ Ib. vi. 7. ⁴ Heb. xiii. 13. Acts v. 41.

⁵ See Matt. xvi. 24.

⁶ Ib. xiii. 20, 21.

⁷ 1 Peter i. 6, 7.

⁸ Matthew v. 10—12. Acts xiii. 50—52. 1 Peter iv. 12, 16.

⁹ Matt. x. 16. Phil. ii. 14—16.

¹⁰ Acts xx. 22—24.

¹¹ 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.

help for him in God. But *Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory and the lifter up of my head. O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.*¹

But have we never taken a devious path in "*declining from the Lord's testimonies,*" to escape the appointed cross? Do we never shrink from "the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth, by reason of the enemy and the avenger?" Can we always in the integrity of our heart appeal to an Omniscient God—"All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant; our heart is not turned back; neither have our steps declined from thy way; though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death?"² This profession is not the foolish confidence of boasting; but the fulfilment of the covenant promise—"I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me."³ So beautifully does the promise of perseverance connect itself with the duty of persevering! And so clearly in this, as in every other way, does the "wrath of man" ("howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so") praise God!⁴ How glorious is the display of the power of his grace in the constancy of his people! like the rocks in the ocean, immovable amidst the fury of the waves; like the trees of the forest, "rooted and established" by every shaking of the tempest! Must not the world, in witnessing the total defeat of their enmity against the Lord's people (or rather its eventual results in their increased prosperity,) be constrained to confess to the honor of God, "*Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel—What hath God wrought?*"⁵

158. *I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.*

WE shall not tire in listening to this repeated expression⁶ of the Psalmist's tenderness for the honor of God. No trouble from his "*many persecutors and enemies*" came so near to his heart as the sight of the dishonor and contempt of God's word. The glory of God was dearer to him than life. Oh! that every recollection of this tried servant of God might deepen this special mark of acceptance upon our too cold and indifferent hearts!⁷ Our joys and sorrows are the pulse of the soul. A fellowship with the joys of angels over repenting sinners⁸ will be accompanied with bitterness of godly sorrow over the hardness and impenitency of those, who "*keep not the word of God.*"

But even here we need much and earnest prayer in order to obtain a clear perception of our real principles. Sin is so subtle in

¹ Psalm iii. 1—3; exl. 7.

² Ib. xliv. 16—19.

³ Jer. xxxii. 40.

⁴ Comp. Isaiah x. 7, with Psalm lxxvi. 10.

⁵ Numbers xxiii. 23.

⁶ Compare verses 53, 136.

⁷ See Ezekiel ix. 4—6.

⁸ Luke iv. 10.

its nature and workings, that it insinuates itself into our holiest desires, and often so far interweaves itself into the graces of the Spirit, as greatly to mar their beauty, and obstruct their operations. How often is zeal for the honor of God mingled with the unhallowed fire of our own spirit?¹ True zeal is indeed a precious fruit of the Spirit, whose other name is love—active, self-denying, compassionate love for sinners. ‘*Let me never fancy I have zeal,*’ said a Christian of a very high order, ‘*till my heart overflows with love to every man living.*’² If then we are really under its holy influence, we shall lose no opportunity of active exertions on behalf of wretched “*transgressors*,” and the limits of our zeal will be only the limits of a fallen world. Especially within our own sphere shall we employ all our labors and pains to stem the tide of unrighteousness, “saying unto the fools—Deal not foolishly—How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?”³

But the fervency of zeal will express itself in something more difficult than personal service. We can often warn and plead with transgressors, when we are sinfully backward in sending up sighs and cries on their behalf; and in presenting these poor lepers by faith to that great and good Physician, whose “power present to heal”⁴ has been so abundantly manifested. This is indeed zeal of rare attainment through our own unbelief; but it brings its own rich blessing to the soul; because it is the zeal of the compassionate Jesus; who, though he looked round on sinners with anger, “being grieved for the hardness of their hearts,”⁵ did not forget to plead on their behalf, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*”⁶ It was the zeal and love of him who identified his Father’s interest with his own, that he endured the reproaches cast upon him in his bosom.⁷ And should not the members feel, when the Head is wounded? Should not we consider every dishonor done to Jesus as a shaft piercing our own breast? Can we bear to “*behold*” all around us united in a conspiracy against the honor and—if it were possible—against the life, of our dearest friend and benefactor, and not be painfully “*grieved*?” Yet genuine “*grief*” must begin with our own hearts—“all of us mourning, every one for his iniquity.”⁸ The wickedness of others will stir up the conviction within our own consciences, “I do remember my faults this day.”⁹ And when once we begin the enumeration, where shall we end? “*Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me*

¹ See Luke ix. 54, 55.

² Martyn’s Life, p. 192.

³ Psalm lxxv. 4. Proverbs i. 22. Ezekiel xxxiii. 11.

⁴ Luke v. 17.

⁵ Mark iii. 5.

⁶ Luke xxiii. 34.

⁷ Psalm lxix. 9, 20, with Rom. xv. 3.

⁸ Celerinus, in Cyrian’s Epistles acquaints a friend with his great grief for the apostasy of a woman through fear of persecution, which afflicted him so much, that at the feast of Easter (the queen of feasts in the primitive church) he wept night and day, and resolved never to know a moment’s delight, till, through the mercy of God, she should be recovered.

⁹ Ezekiel vii. 16.

¹⁰ Genesis xli. 9.

from secret faults!" "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord."¹

159. Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to thy loving-kindness.

"Love for the precepts," such as this Psalm describes, is a distinguishing characteristic of a child of God. "The transgressors" neither "love the precepts," nor desire "quickenings" grace to keep them. For though not "grievous"² in themselves, they are too strict, too humbling for the unrenewed, proud worldly heart.³ Love therefore to them—not being the growth of the natural man—not be "a plant which our heavenly Father hath planted"—a witness of the Spirit of adoption, and the principle of Christian devotedness. And how encouraging is the recollection of the Lord's readiness to "consider how we love his precepts!" "I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."⁴ Thus also did he challenge "the accuser of the brethren, to consider his servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil."⁵

But while love of the precepts realizes the full confidence of the Lord's consideration, the consciousness of its imperfection and scanty measure will always prevent us from urging it as the ground of acceptance. Christian! you know not—or at least you allow not—the proud boast—"God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are."⁶ No, rather—your constant cry to the end is "Quicken me." Your plea is not merit—but mercy. Not that you deserve to be helped, because you "love the precepts:" but you desire and trust to be helped—"according to thy loving-kindness." And what must be the loving-kindness of a God of infinite love! Only do not sit still, and wait for the breezes of his love. Rather call to the "north wind to awake, and to the south wind to blow,"⁷ to fill your sails, and urge you on. God—his word, his works, his perfections, his holiness; Jesus—his pity, his love, his grace—is your delight, your chief delight; yet how infinitely is it below the scriptural standard of privilege, attainment, and expectation!

Under the painful influence of straitened desires and heartless affections, how refreshing is it to mark the springs of life flowing from "the loving-kindness of the Lord!" Yes, indeed—he is the overflowing spring of his Church. Every mercy is his grace. Every holy suggestion is his influence. The least thought of our Christian progress, proceeding from our own resources, opens the door of fearful departure from God. And yet such is the self-deceitfulness of the heart—that, in the very act of professing to "rejoice in Christ Jesus," the Omniscient eye traces a "confidence in the flesh."⁸ The

¹ Psalm xix. 12; cxliii. 2.

² 1 John v. 3.

³ Compare Jer. vi. 10.

⁴ Genesis xviii. 19.

⁵ Job i. 8.

⁶ Luke xviii. 11.

⁷ Cant. iv. 76.

⁸ Phil. iii. 3.

real dependence is on the "mountain that stands strong," not on "the favor that makes" it so.¹ Even our first father, in his original unimpaired strength, could "not quicken his own soul."² Can we wonder that the fallen nature, even though partially upheld by Divine power, is changeable and unstable? The most advanced Christian needs the supply to the end, as much as he did in his first stage of infantine weakness. And will he not continue to need it throughout eternity, in every exercise of adoring service, as well as for his active existence?

But when we ask for this *quicken*ing, are we expecting, as we ought to be, a large answer to our prayer?³ Or are we "limiting our God" by the scanty apprehensions of our poor faith? Remember, he is glorified—not in possessing, but in dispensing his gifts.⁴ If we really expect his blessing, can we be satisfied without it? It is not our unworthiness but our unbelief, that stops the current.⁵ Would that we gave him full credit for his exuberant flow of free, rich, ceaseless mercy!

Blessed Jesus! we plead thy promise to be filled.⁶ We have life from thee; but give it us "*more abundantly*"⁷—as much as these houses of clay—as much as these earthen vessels—can contain. Our taste of thy love, and our knowledge of its unbounded fulness—encourage our plea to ask thee still for more—"Quicken us according to thy loving-kindness." Often as the Psalmist had repeated his prayer for quickening grace,⁸ it was not a "*vain repetition*."⁹ Each time was it enlivened with faith, feeling of necessity, and ardent affection; and should we, in the consciousness of our weakness and coldness, offer it a hundred times a day, it would never fail of acceptance.

160. *Thy word is true from the beginning; and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth forever.*

THE "*loving-kindness and the truth of God*" were two heavenly notes, on which "the sweet Psalmist of Israel" loved to dwell¹⁰—his "*loving-kindness*"—in giving, and his "*truth*" in fulfilling—his gracious promises. Indeed the displays of his truth—whether to his Church collectively, or to his people individually—have always been every way worthy of himself. Often has his word seemed on the eve of being falsified, clearly with the design of a brighter and more striking display of its faithfulness. The very night previous to the close of the four hundred and thirty years, Israel was, to all human appearances, as far from deliverance as at any former pe-

¹ Psalm xxx. 7.

² Ib. xxii. 29.

³ Ib. lxxxi. 10.

⁴ John xiv. 13.

⁵ Matt. xiii. 58. Mark vi. 5.

⁶ Matt. v. 6.

⁷ John x. 10.

⁸ Nine times is this petition urged, verses 25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159.

⁹ Compare Matt. vi. 7.

¹⁰ See his character described—"Good and upright is the Lord," Psalm xxvi. 8—and mark these perfections pleaded in their combined connection with his purposes of grace—"Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham"—"mercy" in the original grant—*truth* in the subsequent ratification and performance. Micah vii. 20. Compare Luke i. 72, 73.

riod. But "the vision was for an appointed time:"¹ nothing could hasten, nothing could delay it; for "*it came to pass at the end of four hundred and thirty years, even the self same day it came to pass*, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt."² At a subsequent period, the family of David appeared upon the point of extinction, and as if the promise of God would fall to the ground: but to exhibit "*the word of God³ as true from the beginning,*" a providential, and almost a miraculous, interference was manifested. When Athalia destroyed all the seed-royal of the house of Judah, Joash was stolen away, put under a nurse, hid in the house of the Lord six years, and in God's appointed time brought forth to the people, *as the fulfilment of the express promise of God—"Behold the king's son shall reign, as the Lord hath said of the sons of David."*⁴ "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."⁵

And thus have many of his own people been tempted in seasons of despondency to "charge God foolishly."⁶ But who of them has not afterwards, in some unexpected deliverance, "set to his seal" — "*Thy word is true from the beginning?*"⁷ "The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, *when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left.*"⁸ And how do these recollections put to shame the suggestions of unbelief, and strengthen our confidence in the prospect, or even in the present endurance, of "manifold temptations!"

The full acknowledgment of the truths of God's word is the ground of all our peace and comfort. The believing reception of the testimony opens to us a free access to God.⁹ We stand before him self-condemned, and yet believe that "there is no condemnation."¹⁰ "The Spirit beareth witness" to and "with our spirits," that "this God is our God, forever and ever"—unto death,¹¹ in death,¹² and through eternity.¹³ In this simplicity of rest upon the testimony, we go to our God, like Abraham, in sensible hopelessness, but in assured confidence, "strong in faith, giving glory to God."¹⁴

Many, however, have been so used to indulge the pride of their own reasonings, that they scarcely know how to read the book of God without cavilling. If they believe while it is in their hands, they are not prepared to give a reason of their faith. They have ventured into conflict with the enemy with unproved armor, and so have been shaken and troubled. *Or perhaps their faith does not reach to the whole testimony*, and therefore being partial only, is not genuine. For if we do not give full credence to all, we do not give true credence to any. We do not receive it on the authority of God, but only so far as our reasoning can explain it, or our will may approve it. What need then have we to pray for a teach-

¹ Hab. ii. 3.² Exodus xii. 41.³ Compare 2 Sam. vii. 16.⁴ 2 Chron. xxii. 10—12; xxiii. 3.⁵ Psalm cvii. 43.⁶ Job i. 22.⁷ Gen. xlii. 36, with xlvi. 15, 16.⁸ Deut. xxxii. 36. Comp. 2 Kings xiv. 26, 27.⁹ Eph. iii. 12.¹⁰ Rom. iii. 19; viii. 1.¹¹ Ib. viii. 16. Psalm xlvi. 14.¹² Psalm lxxiii. 26.¹³ Rev. xxi. 3.¹⁴ Rom. iv. 19, 20.

able simplicity of faith—not asking—“What thinkest thou?” but “*How readeſt thou?*” In this ſpirit we ſhall hold our anchor on ſolid ground; and ſhould we again be “tossed with the tempeſt,” we ſhall look to him, who ſtilleth the ſtorm, and there ſhall be “*a great calm.*”¹ Confidence ſimply built upon the word of God will endure the ſtorm of earth and hell.

Yet we may looſely believe all, while we practically believe none. The generalities of truth have no influence without an individual application. The ſummary look of acquieſcence will miſs all the ſolid bleſſing of a reverential and experimental faith. But to find—as the woman of Samaria found—that ‘it is all true’—because it answers to our convictions, our wants, and our feelings²—to know that the promiſes are true, because they have been fulfilled in us—this is taſting, feeling, handling—this is indeed bleſſedneſs—this makes the word unſpeakably precious to us—“a treaſure to be deſired.”³ To have the witneſs in ourſelves, that “we have not followed cunningly-deviſed fables,” but that it is “a faithful ſaying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Chriſt Jeſus came into the world to ſave ſinners”⁴—this indeed is “life from the dead.” Oh! how ſhould we ſeek thus to receive the word “with much aſſurance!”⁵ The Iſraelites were not ſatisfied with inquiring reſpecting the manna—“What is this?”⁶—or with diſcovering that it had deſcended from heaven; but they gathered it each for himſelf, and fed upon it as their daily bread. Nor will it be of any avail to us to prove beyond contradiction, and to acknowledge with the full-eſt aſſurance the truth of God’s word, unleſs we thus embrace it, and live upon it as our heavenly portion. Faith alone can give this ſpiritual apprehenſion, “*He that believeth hath the witneſs in himſelf.*”⁷ But if the word be the truth of God “*from the beginning,*” it muſt be eternal truth in its character and its reſults; like its Great Author in every particular, “*enduring forever.*” “*Forever, O Lord, thy word is ſettled in heaven; Thy faithfulness is unto all generations.*”⁸ Here is the rock of my confidence. How could I reſt my hope on any ſalvation, that did not proceed from the primary, unchangeable, eternal mind? What aſſurance could I have elſewhere, that the grand plan might not be defeated by ſome unexpected combination? Whereas every heart of reliance in his faithfulness eſtabliſhes more firmly his title to my confidence, and ſtrengthens the ſoul into a habit of intelligent vigorous faith.

Lord! give unto us that “precious faith,” which makes the acknowledgment of the “*truth of thy word from the beginning,*” and its “*endurance forever,*” the ſpring of continual life and conſolation to our ſouls.

¹ Mark iv. 39.² John iv. 29.³ Prov. xxi. 20.⁴ 1 Tim. i. 15.⁵ 1 Theſs. i. 5.⁶ Exod. xvi. 15, margin.⁷ 1 John v. 10.⁸ Verſes 89, 90.

PART XXI.

161. *Princes have persecuted me without a cause; but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.*

So contrary are the principles of God and the world! God chastens his people for their sin.¹ The world persecutes them for their godliness.² So it has been from the beginning,³ and will continue to the end.⁴ David had before mentioned his *persecutors as many*.⁵ Now he tells us, that they were like those of David's Lord, the *princes* of the earth.⁶ In both cases, however, was it confessedly *without cause*.⁷ Had it been *with cause*, it would have been his shame.⁸ Now it was his glory.⁹ In the former case it would have been his own—here it was his Master's—cross.

His *awe of God's word* was the gracious restraint to his own spirit.¹⁰ And this godly fear has always marked the people of God. Witness Joseph,¹¹ Moses,¹² Nehemiah,¹³ and the Jews,¹⁴ and the three Babylonish captives.¹⁵ Josiah also obtained a special mark of acceptance.¹⁶ For the man "*that trembleth at God's word*," whether he be found on the throne or on the dunghill, is the man "*to whom the Lord will look*."¹⁷ And certainly where—as with David—the wrath of *princes* and the wrath of God are weighed against each other—who can doubt, but that it is better to incur the persecution of men by a decided adherence to the word of God, than the wrath of God, by declining from it?

Our Saviour, "knowing what was in man," had clearly forewarned and fore-armed his disciples against these difficulties.¹⁸ The trial at the first onset proved too hard for them; Peter's "*heart stood in awe*" of the "*persecuting princes*," and in a moment of temptation he disowned his Master:¹⁹ but when "the Spirit of power"²⁰ was poured from on high, such was the "*holy awe*," in which himself and his brethren "*stood of God's word*," that they declared, in the face of the whole council—"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. We ought to obey God rather than men."²¹ 'I fear God,' Colonel Gardiner used to say, 'and I have nothing else to fear.'

Indeed the spirit of adoption—the Christian's distinguishing character and privilege—produces an awe of God, a dread of sin—

¹ Isa. xxvii. 9.

² John xv. 19.

³ Gal. iv. 29.

⁴ 2 Tim. iii. 12.

⁵ Verse 157.

⁶ Verse 23. 1 Sam. xviii. 8, 28, 29, with Ps. ii. 2. 1 Cor. ii. 8.

⁷ 1 Sam. xxiv. 17; xxvi. 21. John xv. 25. Matt. xxvi. 59, 60. Comp. Dan. vi. 4, 5.

⁸ Verse 39. 1 Peter ii. 20; iii. 17; iv. 15.

⁹ Verse 46. 2 Sam. vi. 22. Matt. v. 10—12. 1 Peter iv. 14.

¹⁰ 1 Sam. xxiv. 6.

¹¹ Gen. xxxix. 9.

¹² Heb. xi. 27.

¹³ Neh. v. 15.

¹⁴ Ezra ix. 4; x. 3.

¹⁵ Dan. iii. 16—18.

¹⁶ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 26, 27.

¹⁷ Isa. lxvi. 2.

¹⁸ Luke xii. 11, 12.

¹⁹ Matt. xxvi. 69—75.

²⁰ 2 Timothy. i. 7.

²¹ Acts iv. 19, 29; v. 29.

ning against the tenderest Father, of grieving the dearest Friend. And this *awe* of God will naturally extend to *his word*: so that we shall be more tenderly afraid of disregarding its dictates, than the most faithful subject of breaking the law of his beloved Sovereign. There is nothing slavish or legal in this fear. It is the freedom and the holiness of the Gospel; the very soul of religion; the best preservative of our joys and privileges; and the best evidence of their scriptural character. We shall find, with David, this principle a valuable safeguard against the richest allurements, or the most powerful reproach of men, to "go beyond the word of the Lord to do less or more."¹

But what must be the state of that heart, where the word of the great God—the Creator and Judge of the earth—commands no reverence! Could the sinner hear a voice from heaven, addressed distinctly to himself, would he dare to reject it? Yet "we have a more sure word, whereunto we do well that we take heed;"² that we receive it with silent *awe*, bow before it with the most unlimited subjection, and yield ourselves entirely to its holy influence. But if it does not stand infinitely higher in our estimation than all—even the best—books of man, we have no just perception of its value, nor can we except any communication of its treasures to our hearts. The holiness of God is stamped upon its every sentence.³ Let us then cherish an awe of this word—"receiving it"—not as a common book, "not as the word of man; but as it is in truth, the word of God,"⁴ in the true spirit of Cornelius and his company—"Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."⁵

162. *I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.*

THE "*awe*" in which we should "*stand of God's word*," so far from hindering our delight in it, is, as we have just hinted, the most suitable preparation for its most happy enjoyment.⁶ In receiving every word of it as the condescending message from him, before whom angels veil their faces, we shall "*rejoice at it, as those that find great spoil.*" Often had David found "*great spoil*" in his many wars;⁷ but never had his greatest victories

¹ Numb. xxii. 18.

² 2 Peter i. 19.

³ The Jews' frontispiece to their great Bible is Jacob's expression of fear and astonishment upon his vision of God at Bethel—"How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" 'So ought we,' as Dr. Owen remarks upon this, 'to look upon the word with a holy awe and reverence of the presence of God in it.'

⁴ I would advise you all, that come to the reading or hearing of this book, which is the word of God, the most precious jewel, and most holy relic that remaineth upon earth, that ye bring with you the fear of God, and that ye do it with all due reverence, and use your knowledge thereof, not to vain glory of frivolous disputation, but to the honor of God, increase of virtue, and edification both of yourselves and others.—Cranmer's Judgment of Scripture, p. 20.

⁴ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

⁵ Acts x. 33. On this particular a hint from a heathen may not be unworthy of our remark. "Ehud said to Eglon, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat." Judges iii. 20.

⁶ Ps. cxii. 1. Acts ix. 31.

⁷ At Ziklag—1 Samuel xxx. 19, 26—41 From the children of Ammon—2 Samuel xii. 20.

brought him such rich *spoil*, as he had now discovered in the word of God. The *joy* in this treasure (like that of the church at the advent of Christ,¹ described by this figure) evidently implied no common delight. If then the saints of old could so largely enrich their souls from their scanty portion of the word; must not we, who are favored with the entire revelation of God, acknowledge, "the lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage?"²

This expressive image may remind us, that the *spoils of this precious word* are not to be gained without conflict: Here "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence." Our natural taste and temper revolt from *the word*. Our indolence indisposes for the necessary habitual effort of prayer, self-denial, and faith. But still "the violent *do take* the kingdom by force."³ No pains are lost—no struggle ineffectual. What *great spoil* is divided as the fruit of the conflict! What abundant recompense is in reserve for the "good soldier of Jesus Christ, who is determined, in Divine strength, to "endure hardness,"⁴ until he overcomes the reluctance of his heart for the spiritual duty! It is not a sudden flash, or impression upon the imagination; but the conqueror's joy in spoiling the field of conflict—solid and enriching. Sometimes indeed (as in the Syrian camp⁵) we *find the spoil* unexpectedly. Sometimes we see the treasure long before we can make it our own. And when we gird ourselves to the conflict, paralyzed by the weakness of our spiritual perceptions and the power of unbelief; many a prayer, and many a sigh is sent up for Divine aid, before we are crowned with victory, and as the fruit of our conquest, joyfully appropriate the word to our present distress.

But from a cursory, superficial reading of the word of God, no such fruit can be anticipated. When therefore the flesh or the world have deadened our delight, and taken from us this "*great spoil*," should we not arm ourselves for a repossession of it? Should we be unaffected by our loss? Oh, then, since there are such treasures found and enjoyed in this field of conflict, let us not lose our interest in them by the indulgence of presumption, heartlessness, or despondency. Before we attempt to read, cry to the Lord, under the sense of utter helplessness to perform one spiritual act, for his powerful help and Almighty teaching. Then we shall persevere with unconquerable and unwearied vigor, and not fail to share in the blessed spoil of victory, views of a Saviour's dying love—an interest in the precious blessings of the cross—"great spoil"—"unsearchable riches."⁶

163. *I hate and abhor lying; but thy law do I love.*

WE can neither "*stand in awe of God's word*," nor "*rejoice at it*," unless we abhor all contrary ways. And here lies the spiritual conflict. For so opposed are our natural affections to the character

¹ Isaiah ix. 3.

⁴ 2 Tim. ii. 3.

² Psalm xvi. 6.

⁵ 2 Kings vii. 8.

³ Matt. xi. 12.

⁶ Eph. iii. 8.

and will of God, that we love what God hates, and we hate what God loves. Our new principle and bias, however, as directly falls in with the dictates of God's law, as before we had revolted from it. "*Lying*" is now "*hated and abhorred*" as contrary to "a God of truth;" and the "*law*" is now "*loved*" as the reflection of his image, and the manifestation of his will. David had before prayed to have "*lying ways removed from him*" and a love for the law of God imparted.¹ His utter detestation shows, that these *ways had been removed*, and a renewed *inclination to the law granted to him*.

To have *avoided "lying,"* and to have *practised the law,* might have been sufficient for the regulation of his outward conduct. But *his* was the religion of the heart—not meant only to control his actions; but to renew his habits, motions, tempers, and taste. He would not therefore only *refrain* from lying, or manifest a *disinclination to it*—he must "*hate and abhor*"² it as hell itself. Nor was *external conformity*, or approval of the law, his standard; he must "*love*" it. If sin was counted common, fashionable, venial, profitable, or pleasant; if contempt was cast upon the law of God—this stopped him not. Every sin—though only a hairbreath deviation from the rule—was in his eyes hateful, defiling, damning. He would "*resist unto blood*, striving against it."³ Every act, desire, and habit of conformity, with whatever shame it might be attended, was his delight. Such—Christian—should be our standard. Lord! humble us in the daily sense of deviation and defect. Vouchsafe to us larger desires, growing conformity to thy perfect rule.

Well had it been for Eve and for her children, had she turned from the tempter's lie with this strong determination.⁴ But—"Ye shall not surely die"—has from that fatal moment been a most effectual instrument in captivating unwary souls. So plausible is it in itself, so agreeable to our natural inclinations, that it is readily cherished, even where the first contact with temptation assures the wretched victims, that its "*deceit is falsehood.*" But they do not "*hate and abhor it*:" they do not flee from it, as a concern for the honor of God and their own safety would lead them; and therefore justly are they "given up to believe it,"⁵ as the fruit of their delusion, and the punishment of their unfaithfulness. Oh! if we are ever tempted by the flattery and allurements of the world, let us only mark the opposition of their standard, taste, maxims, and pursuits to the truth of God, and we shall turn away with *hatred and abhorrence*.

The "overseers of the purchased flock"⁶ of Christ—yea, all "who earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the

¹ See verse 29.

² Under this "*hated and abhorred lying*" he intended to include, not only those more or less direct deviations from truth, of which he had himself been guilty, (with Abimelech, 1 Sam. xxi. 2—twice with Achish, 1 Sam. xxi. 13; xxvii. 10,) but, as we before remarked, whatever in any shape, or form, or degree, is inconsistent with the truth of God. Compare on verse 22.

³ Heb. xii. 4.

⁴ Gen. iii. 4—6.

⁵ 2 Thess. ii. 11.

⁶ Acts xx. 28.

saints¹—will anxiously watch any deterioration of doctrine or principle—any deviation from the simplicity of the Gospel, and brand it as a lie. “I have not written unto you,” said the venerable Apostle, “because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.” Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?² How does the great Apostle teach us to look at the *adulteration of the doctrine of grace* before referred to³—a system not of faith, but of fear—not of joy, but of slavish awe—not of confidence, but of doubt—palsying the springs of life; withering—blighting—chilling—the glow of love; “entangling again the free-born children of God in a yoke of bondage!”⁴ The champion of the faith would not tolerate it for a moment.⁵ And he bids his people *hate and abhor* it—even though from an angel’s mouth—as the beguiling *lie* of the great “corrupter” of the Church.⁶ Equally would he have us *abhor the licentious abuse of the Gospel*—flowing from the same source—“*Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!*”⁷

After all however—this verse must include an *abhorrence* of the literal sin of *lying* in all its forms. A lie is so gross a sin, that we might be disposed to spiritualize this expression, rather than to analyze some of the plausible shapes, in which the sin may be detected in our own profession. Exaggeration—a false gloss—a slight deviation (hardly perceptible) from the straight line—excuses for faults made to one another, which we dared not make to God—want of accuracy in relating what we hear—all these are forms of *lying* to be shunned, *hated and abhorred* by the man, who is really “walking in the light, and having fellowship with God,”⁸ as much as the more palpable falsehoods, with which the world abounds, which it excuses, and even boasts of.

Believer! would you have your *hatred and abhorrence* of every kind of *lying* yet further deepened? Would you summon every passion of the soul—“indignation, vehement desire, zeal, revenge”⁹—against it? Then learn to “*abhor*” it, not only as *your* enemy, but as God’s.¹⁰ Pray that the arrow of conviction may be dipped in the blood of Christ; and then, however deep and painful be the wound, it cannot be mortal. Mortal indeed it will be to the sin, but healing to the soul. Pray that your *hatred* of sin may flow from a sense of reconciliation; for never will it be so perfect, as when you feel yourself sheltered from its everlasting curse.¹¹ To lie before your Saviour as his redeemed sinner, and to wash his feet with your tears of contrition, will be your highest and happiest privilege on this side heaven. In this spirit and daily posture you will most clearly manifest the inseparable connection of a *hatred of lying ways with a love for the law of God*.

¹ Jude 3.

² 1 John ii. 21, 22.

³ Page 398.

⁴ Gal. iv. 31; v. 1.

⁵ Ib. ii. 4, 5.

⁶ Ib. i. 8, 9, with 2 Cor. xi. 2—4.

⁷ Rom. vi. 1, 2.

⁸ 1 John i. 5—7.

⁹ 2 Cor. vii. 11.

¹⁰ Comp. Psalm cxxxix. 21, 22.

¹¹ Comp. Ezekiel xvi. 63; xxvi. 31; xx. 43

164. *Seven times a day do I praise thee, because of thy righteous judgments.*

DAVID had just spoken of his *fear, joy, hatred and love*. He now expresses his love in praise. And indeed it is the mixture of praise with prayer, that makes this Psalm so complete an exhibition of Christian experience. Early and late, and habitually throughout the day, have we seen this man of God "*give himself to prayer.*"¹ But his "spirit of supplication," in strict conformity with the Apostolical rule, was ever mingled "*with thanksgiving.*"² Indeed, self-love—the sense of want—may prompt us to pray. But love to God is the spirit of praise. The neglect therefore of this service is robbing God, no less than ourselves. Not that he needs it, but that he deserves and desires it. Not that it brings any merit to us, but that it strengthens our dependence, and elevates our love. If then we feel it to be "good,³ comely,⁴ and pleasant,"⁵ it will be as needless to define its frequency, as to prescribe the limit of our service to a beloved friend, to whom our obligations were daily increasing. The casuistry of love would answer all the entangling scruples of a bondage system. We should aim at living in praise,⁶ as the element of our souls, the atmosphere of our enjoyment, our reward more than our duty—that which identifies our interest with heaven, and forms our meetness for it.

Young Christians indeed sometimes unwarily bring themselves into "bondage," in forcing their consciences to a frequency of set times for duty, intrenching either upon outward circumstances or the weakness of the flesh. Our rule of service, though not measured by our indolence, yet should be accommodated to those legitimate daily engagements, which, when "*done as to the Lord,*"⁷ form as real and necessary a part of our religion, as the more spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise. To observe any particular time (beyond the Sabbath, and "the morning and evening sacrifice,") "*because it is the time—however wearied our spirits may be, or however immediate obligations may interfere,* is to forget the weighty instruction of one well qualified to speak, "*Bodily exercise profiteth little;*"⁸ and we must "go and learn what that meaneth, "*I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.*"⁹ Growth in grace will however gradually mould our profession into habitual intercourse with God. As our views become more solid and settled, each duty of the day will find its proper place, our services will become more free, and our obedience more evangelical.

But the formalist considers "*seven times a day*"—to be an infringement of the sacred canon—"Be not righteous overmuch."¹⁰ He pays his customary service twice a-day; he says his prayers, and his praises too; and his conscience slumbers again. And alas! there are times of slumber, when we little differ from him. Oh!

¹ See on verses 147, 148.

² Phil. iv. 6. *Seven times.* Comp. Prov. xxiv. 16.

³ Psalm xcii. 1.

⁴ Ib. xxxiii. 1.

⁵ Ib. cxxxv. 3.

⁶ Ib. xxxiv. 1; lxxi. 8, 14. Luke xxiv. 53.

⁷ Col. iii. 23. Eph. vi. 7; v. 20. Heb. xiii. 15.

⁸ 1 Tim. iv. 8.

⁹ Hosca vi. 6, with Matt. ix. 13; xii. 7.

¹⁰ Eccles. vii. 16.

let us be alarmed at every symptom of such a state, and “find no rest to our spirit,” until we have regained some measure of this frame of hearty and overflowing praise. If there be a heavenly nature, there must be a heavenly work. Tongue and heart should be set on fire by love. Thus we will go to our work—whatever it may be—and sing at it.

But the Christian sometimes feels, that he has no heart, and—he almost fears—no right to praise. Having no sensible token of love to call him forth, his harp “hangs upon the willows;” nor does he care to take it down, even to “sing one of the Lord’s songs in this strange land.”¹ But how many have found with Bunyan—“When I believe and *sing*, my doubting ceases!” “Meat cometh out of the eater”—cheering rays out of the darkest cloud. Endeavor, therefore, to bring to mind some spiritual, or even temporal, mercies. Or, if recollection fails you, open your Bible; turn to some subject of praise, such as the song of the Angels at the birth of our Saviour;² or the song of the Redeemed to the honor of the Lamb.³ Have you no part or interest in it? Do you not need the Saviour? Can you be happy without him? Then inquire, and feel, and try, whether you cannot give “thanks unto God for his unspeakable gift.”⁴ Peradventure your notes may rise into praise, and in the excitement of praise, prayer will again mingle itself with its wonted enjoyment. It is your sinful folly to yield to that continual depression, which unfits you for the exercise of your duties and your privileges. How fully do our Liturgical services elevate and sustain the elevation of the soul heavenwards! Language better adapted for strengthening its feeble aspiration will not readily be found; consecrated as it is in the remembrance of its acceptable use by a throng of the Lord’s favored people during successive generations, now united to the general assembly above, and worshipping with everlasting acceptance “before the throne of God and the Lamb.”

The Lord’s *righteous judgments* in his word are a constant matter for praise. Such light, food, and comfort! Such a strong hold of God! Such a firm hope to anchor on! Such a clear rule to walk by! Truly the distinguishing favor of this gracious gift stirs up the song—“*Praise ye the Lord.*”⁵ Add to which—the *righteous judgments*—his decrees and declarations respecting his Church—occupied the Psalmist’s “midnight,”⁶ as well as his daily, song—“*O Lord, thou art my God*”—said the enraptured prophet in the name of the Church—“*I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things: thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.*” Inscrutable indeed they may sometimes appear; and opposed to our best prospects of happiness; yet the language of faith in the darkest hour will be—“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.”⁷ But neither “seven

¹ Ps. cxxxvii. 2, 4.

² Luke. ii. 13, 14. ³ Rev. v. 12.

⁴ 2 Cor. ix. 15.

⁵ Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20; lvi. 10.

⁶ Verse 62.

⁷ Isa. xxv. 1.

⁸ Rom. viii. 28.

times a-day" nor "seventy times seven," will satisfy us in heaven. Then our song—even "the song of Moses and the Lamb—will still be the "Lord's *righteous judgments*;"¹ and for this ever "new song" the harps of God will never be unstrung, and never out of tune, throughout an eternity of praise.² But a moment, and we shall be engaged in this heavenly employ—no reluctancy of the spirit—no weariness of the flesh. Every moment is hastening on this near—this cheering—this overwhelming glorious—prospect. Blessed be God!

165. *Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.*

HERE is the happiness of a child of God summed up in one word—*peace*. Looked at with an eye of sense, slighted by the world, and often chastened with "the rod of affliction," he is an object of pity. But look at him with the eye of faith—he *loves the law of his God*, and his heritage is *peace*. Every feature of the covenant bears some resemblance to its nature: full of grace, peace, and love. Two of the agents are fitly represented by the lamb and the dove—emblems of peace. The tendency of its principles "is first pure, then peaceable."³ Its present enjoyment—privilege—*peace*—"great peace."⁴ Its end will be universal—eternal⁵ peace.

Christian! Have you not discovered the connection of *peace with love for the law*—the whole revealed will of God?⁶ Looking at it as *the law of truth*—was not its disturbance of your peace of self-satisfaction and self-delusion the first step to the attainment of solid peace? You learned to see yourself as God sees you. Every fresh view humbled you more deeply. Your dissatisfaction exercised you in an anxious and diligent search for true peace. And then, looking at it again as "*the law of faith*"—here is your ground of peace laid open. Your way to God is clear—your acceptance free—your confidence assured—your communion heavenly. "Being justified by faith, you have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" yea—you are "filled with peace, *all peace in believing*."⁷ And have you not equal reason to "*love this law*" as a *law of obedience*? Here is your question answered—"Lord! what wilt thou have me to do?"⁸ Let "this word dwell in you richly in all wisdom;" and it will be your daily directory of life and conduct. You will "delight in it after the inner man."⁹ Walking in the light of it, you will go on to the full enjoyment of *peace*. "Taking" cheerfully your Saviour's "yoke upon you, and learning of him, you will" ever "find rest unto your soul." "All his paths are peace."¹⁰

Professor! what do you lose by your indulged indifference to *the law of God*? Conscience tells you, that you are a stranger to this peace—this "*great peace*." A secret root of idolatry cankers the principles of peace. Notions will not bring it. Nothing but

¹ Rev. xv. 3, 4; xvi. 7.

² Ib. iv. 8.

³ James iii. 17.

⁴ Isa. xi. 6—9. Comp. ii. 4.

⁵ Ps. xxxvii. 36. Rom. ii. 10.

⁶ Isa. xliii. 4.

⁷ Rom. v. 1, 10, 11; xv. 13.

⁸ Acts ix. 6.

⁹ Rom. vii. 22.

¹⁰ Matt. xi. 29. Prov. iii. 17.

vital godliness—the “*love for God’s law*”—“the truth received in the love of it”—will realize the blessing.

Young Christian! be not disheartened, though your “*love to the law*” be so weak, interrupted, clouded, that sometimes you fear, that you have no love at all. Do you not mourn over its coldness? Do you not desire to love? Seek to know more of the constraining influence of the love of Christ. If your chariot wheels now, like those of the Egyptians, drive heavily; you will then move like the chariots in the prophet’s vision, “upon wheels and upon wings.”¹ At least you are on the way to peace. Stir up the habit of diligent faith; be active—be more earnest in dependence on the Lord. Soon will he visit you with his cheering sunshine,² and bless you with his heavenly *peace*. “The Lord is your shepherd;” and dwelling near the shepherd’s tent, “you shall not want.”³ Nothing comes to you without his appointment; and whatever he takes away was only what he had first given, and leaves you nothing but to say—“Blessed be the name of the Lord!”⁴ Whatever he lays upon you is infinitely less than you deserve, and with the fatherly design “to do you good at the latter end.”⁵ Whatever he gives you is peace, “*great peace*”—“*perfect peace* ;”⁶ and though at best, *as to its actual enjoyment*, it is only a checkered gift, linked with “this world’s tribulation,”⁷ yet as the earnest of that “*peace*, into which the righteous shall enter, when taken away from the evil to come”⁸—it is an incalculable blessing.

The steadfastness of our profession is a most important fruit of this blessing—“*Nothing shall offend them.*”⁹ The daily cross,¹⁰ the humbling doctrine,¹¹ the fiery trial¹²—which, by *offending the professor*, detect the unsoundness of his heart—these are the principles of strength and consolation to the faithful *lover of God’s law*. Those “had no root in themselves,” who were stumbled by “tribulation or persecution.”¹³ Hence there was no *love* in their hearts; consequently, no *peace* in their experience, and no stability in their course. The frequency of such cases in a day of profession is a most painful subject of observation. A course of religion, commenced under the impulse of momentary excitement, is like “a reed shaken by the wind.” The first breath of the storm beats down all resolutions, that were not formed upon the conviction of utter helplessness, and in entire dependence upon Divine grace.¹⁴ Light without *love* ends in fearful ruin.¹⁵ Genuine *love to the law* alone keeps the soul—a love of no common character—a devoted, persevering attachment. The claim of the law is above every other. Everything—even life itself—if need be—must be sacrificed for it.¹⁶ And when it has been thus embraced on a fair calculation of its cost, from a deep sense of its value, and with a spiritual perception of its

¹ Comp. Exod. xiv. 25, with Ezek. i. 15, 23.

³ Psalm xxix. 11; lxxxv. 8; xxiii. 1.

⁴ Job i. 21.

² Mal. iv. 2.

⁸ Deut. viii. 16.

⁶ Isaiah xxvi. 3.

⁷ John xvi. 33.

⁸ Isa. lvii. 1, 2.

⁹ ‘To them is no stumbling-block.’—*Ainsworth*.

¹⁰ Mark x. 21, 22.

¹¹ John vi. 60, 65, 6.

¹² Matt. xiii. 21.

¹³ Mark iv. 17.

¹⁴ Comp. John xv. 5. 2 Cor. xii. 9.

¹⁵ 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.

¹⁶ Rev. xii. 11.

character and application to our necessities—*there will be no stumbling block.*

Indeed genuine love will prove our safeguard *against all grounds of offence.* The doctrine of the total depravity of man is objected to; but "*love to the law of God*"—moulding our minds into its heavenly impression—will remove all ground of offence. The pride of man's wisdom revolts from the doctrine of the cross, and the freeness of the grace of God. But we *love* it as a part of the "*law of faith.*" It suits our case. It answers our need—and therefore here also "*nothing offends us.*" Thus whatever be the hinderance—whether from Satan or himself—whether from the enmity of the world or the inconsistencies of the Church—the believer, while he mourns over these things, is *not offended at them*, or at the Gospel through them. He has learned a more Scriptural standard, and to exercise a more discriminating judgment. "*Love to the law of God*" enables him—instead of being "tossed to and fro" in doubtful perplexity—to "make straight paths for his feet."¹ If his cross be grievous, he seeks from the Lord a quiet spirit; and thus, "in patience possessing his soul," he finds "the yoke easy, and the burden light."² His difficulties exercise and strengthen his faith, and add fresh testimony to the faithfulness of the promise. Whether therefore his way be dark or light, his soul is at peace. In the enjoyment of his Saviour's love, he has the witness in his own heart, that "the work of righteousness"—of "*love to the law of his God*"—"shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance forever."³

166. *Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.*

THE "*great peace*" connected with "*the love of God's law,*" is at once the fruit of faith, and the motive of obedience. And the enjoyment of it leads the man of God to give renewed expression to his faith and devotedness. "Faith, which worketh by love,"⁴ is no less the characteristic of the Old, than of the New Testament Church. For mark here the principle and the object of faith—"I have hoped for thy salvation"—and the practical influence of faith—I have "*done thy commandments.*" "Walked not believers always in the same spirit? Walked they not in the same steps?"

Faith is the exercise of the soul in a sense of need, in desire, and in trust. Faith goes to God on the ground of the promise—*hope* in the expectation of the thing promised. Thus *hope* implies the operation of faith. It appropriates to itself the object of faith. The power to take hold of the promises of faith, and to stay our souls upon their "everlasting consolation," is the energy of "a good hope through grace"—such as "maketh not ashamed."⁵ Conscious un-

¹ Hebrews xii. 13, with Proverbs iv. 25—27.

³ Isaiah xxxii. 17.

⁵ 2 Thess. ii. 16. Rom. v. 5.

² Luke xxi. 19. Matt. xi. 30.

⁴ Galatians v. 6.

worthiness may give a trembling feebleness to the hand of faith, but the feeblest apprehension of one of the least of the promises of the Gospel assures us of our interest in them all. Why may we not set all the fulness of the covenant before the weakest as well as before the strongest believer, and proclaim to both with equal freedom the triumphant challenge—“*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth?*”¹ Every believer is alike interested in the Gospel of grace. “There is no difference” *in the righteousness* of the Gospel, which is “the righteousness of God”—nor in *the imputation* of it, which is “*unto all and upon all*”—nor *in the subjects*,—which is *them that believe*—nor *in the means of its application*, which in all cases is “*by faith of Jesus Christ*”—nor *in the need of the blessing*—“*All have sinned*” without difference. All therefore are justified without difference.² The only difference regards *the strength or weakness* of the faith, by which the righteousness is more or less distinctly appropriated, and its consequent blessings enjoyed. No soul however can sink into perdition, that grasps the promise of Christ with the hand of faith, be that hand ever so weak and trembling; though, if the promise did not hold us more firmly by its unchangeableness, than we hold it by our faith, who could ever attain the blessing?

Not indeed that our interest in the Gospel is transient or uncertain. For though the perception of it may be often interrupted, yet is it not still in the Bible—in the covenant of God—in the heart of God? And is it not constantly renewed in the exercise of faith? The repetition of the same act of faith is therefore equally necessary every moment, as at the first moment of our spiritual life. Whatever be our standing in the Gospel, faith will always realize to the end the same *hope for God's salvation*. Indeed, the neglect of the cultivation of its habitual exercise materially weakens its operation in great emergencies. Let it then be regarded as the breathing of the soul. Let it be constantly exercised in the successive occasions of need; and we shall enjoy its clear light and active influence upon occasions, where its special energy is required.

Now is not this sometimes your experience? You are distressed by an unsuccessful struggle with wandering, defiling imaginations. You know the promise, and the remedy. But “the shield of faith” has been laid by. You have therefore to seek it, when you want it at hand for the present moment; and thus you lie powerless, at a distance from the cure, instead of being able to bring your sin at once to Jesus—“Lord, this is my trouble; this is the ‘plague of my heart;’ but speak the word only, and thy servant shall be healed.”³ Thus the indolent neglect of the quickening principle greatly impairs its powerful energy, and the “confidence and rejoicing of hope”⁴ flowing from it. “If the life in the flesh is” not “a life of faith on the Son of God,” no solid rest or acceptance can be known.

¹ Rom. viii. 33, 34.

³ Matt. viii. 8.

² Rom. iii. 22, 23.

⁴ Heb. iii. 6. 14.

But on what ground is this "*hope for the Lord's salvation*" built? On his faithfulness, not on our sincerity; on his promises—not on our frames; on his unchangeableness, not on our constancy.¹ It is built—not on the work of grace in us, but on the work of Christ for us—a work, which has satisfied every claim, provided every security, and pledged all the Divine perfections on our behalf—a work so finished and complete, that all the difficulties of salvation on the part of God are removed; and the sinner, finding no hinderance in the way *but himself*, is warranted, though covered with guilt and defilement, to apply for full, immediate, and unconditional forgiveness. What then hinders the instant reception of the privilege, but disbelief of the record? It is this which dares to "make God a liar;"² which therefore must not, as is too often the case, be lamented as an infirmity (except, indeed, in cases of constitutional weakness;) but watched, prayed against, and resisted, as a deep and aggravated sin. The present enjoyment of the blessing is indeed often marred by looking at *the fruits of faith* (contrition, love, diligence, &c.) as prerequisites for believing, instead of looking *to the object of faith*, to put away our sin, and to produce these fruits in us. *This* not only binds our sin upon us, but robs God of his honor; and, whilst it restrains his blessing on our souls, reflects upon His wisdom and grace, who has laid the foundation of a sinner's hope on his own dear Son,³ irrespective of any warrant of faith in himself. We want to be enlivened with sensible comfort, *as a ground for our believing in Christ*; or, if we look for it from faith, it is from faith, *as an act* (in which respect it is no more a proper ground for comfort than any other grace,) instead of looking for it *from the object of faith*. Thus we not only lose the peace and joy we are seeking, but we lose it by our mistaken way of seeking it.

The fulness of Christ, and the promises of God in him, are the only basis of a full assurance of salvation: and *this* basis is equally firm at all times, and under all circumstances. "*Ye are complete in him.*"⁴ Your title is as perfect—your interest as secure, as ever it will be at the day of "*the redemption of the purchased possession.*"⁵ Awakened sinner! let not then a sense of unworthiness paralyze your faith. As a guilty sinner, you are invited. As a willing sinner, you are welcome. As a believing sinner, you are assured. Why hesitate then to "lay hold on eternal life?" Is it presumption in the drowning man to attempt to swim to the rock of safety? Why then should not the sinking soul cast itself upon the "Rock of Ages?" "*Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation.*"

Believer! "Behold!" saith the Lord, "I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." "Hold fast your confidence and the rejoicing of your hope."⁶ This is of no trifling importance. An established confidence ought to result

¹ Heb. vi. 17, 18.

⁴ Col. ii. 10.

² 1 John v. 10.

⁵ Eph. i. 14.

³ Isaiah xxviii. 16.

⁶ Rev. iii. 11. Heb. iii. 6.

from, and to witness to, your interest in the Lord's salvation.¹ For without it, you have no relief from the spirit of bondage; no enlargement in duties; no enjoyment of privileges: no "growth in grace, and in the knowledge of the Saviour;" no honored usefulness in the Church of God: the "things which remain will be ready to die."² Rest not, then, satisfied with an occasional gleam of light and joy, while your horizon is overcast with doubts and fears. Waste not time in heartless complaints, that would be far better employed in a vigorous habit of faith. Live above frames and feelings upon this glorious truth—"Christ has undertaken for me." He lives, and reigns, and pleads for every sinner that trusts in him. Exercise your dependence upon him in importunate and persevering supplication. "Give all diligence"—at all times—in all ways, private and public—"instant in season and out of season." Thus, "an entrance into" the joy, peace, and glory of "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour will be richly ministered unto you."³ You shall be released from the prison-house of despondency, and shall breathe the free atmosphere of adoption and heavenly love.

But remember, that this "assurance of hope," even in its weakest and lowest influence, is a practical principle—"I have done thy commandments." "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."⁴ All obedience that springs not from this source is of a low and legal character; the fruit of self-will, self-righteousness, self-sufficiency. Evangelical obedience can only flow from Evangelical faith and hope. Love to Christ catches fire from the perception of his love to us. Without this perception, all is weariness, toil, and travail of soul in his service; duty, not privilege; constraint, not delight; conscience, not love. Hence the most assured believers will be the most devoted servants of their Master. "The joy of the Lord"—"the joy of faith," of acceptance, of communion—"is their strength."⁵ They live by faith; and as they believe, they love; they deny themselves; they lay themselves out for their Master's work; they conquer all that oppose their progress.

We cannot, therefore, "do his commandments" without "a hope for his salvation." For only in proportion as we have assured our title to the promises of the Gospel, can we take hold of them, plead them, or experience their support. When, therefore, our hope is indistinct, we are almost left to our own unassisted resources; and our course will probably end in "perpetual backsliding." *Active devotedness flows from assured acceptance.*⁶ Where there is no certainty, there can be little love, little delight, little diligence. Let us walk in sunshine, and we shall work cheerfully and honorably for God.⁷

Keep then the eye fixed on Christ as *the ground*, and on obedience as *the evidence*, of our *hope*. Thus will our own confidence

¹ See Heb. iii. 6. Whose house are we—if we, &c. ib. 14.

² Rev. iii. 2.

³ 2 Peter i. 5—11.

⁴ 1 John iii. 3.

⁵ Neh. viii. 10.

⁶ See 1 Cor. xv. 58.

⁷ Comp. Isa. vi. 6—8.

be more established; and others, beholding in us the power of our Christian hope, will be led to say—"We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."¹

¹ Zech. viii. 23. We conclude with giving a full and Scriptural view of the principles and character of Christian assurance. *That a full sense of acceptance with God grounded upon the Divine testimonies is attainable*—there can be no doubt. The "covenant ordered in all things and sure"—(2 Sam. xiii. 5.) offers ample warrant for the most assured confidence. The promises of this covenant are full, free, multiplied; adapted to all possible diversity of cases—attested by the oath and seal of God for this declared end—"the full assurance of hope, and the "strong consolation" of his people. (Heb. vi. 11-18.) The instructions of our Lord and his Apostles had the same blessed purpose in view. (John xv. 11; xvi. 33; 1 John v. 13.) The design and efficacy of his atonement—as contrasted with the weakness of the legal services—was, to make his people "perfect as pertaining to the conscience." (Heb. ix. 9, with x. 14.) Under both dispensations has this sense of appropriation and conscious security been maintained. (Job xix. 25. Psalm xviii. 1. Cant. ii. 16; vii. 10. 2 Tim. i. 12. 1 John iv. 16; v. 19, 20.) Its basis is ground common to all. (Rom. viii. 35, 38, 39, with 31-34.) The want of it is evidently reproved. (2 Cor. xiii. 5.) Exhortations are given to press forward to it. (Heb. vi. 11. 2 Peter i. 10.) *Faith*, (Eph. i. 13. Heb. vi. 17, 18.) *Obedience*, (Isaiah xxxii. 17; xlvi. 17, 18; lxiv. 5; John xiv. 21-23. 1 John ii. 3-5; iii. 21.) *The fear of God*, (Psalm xxv. 14.) *Love*, (1 John iii. 14, 18-21; iv. 12.) *Diligence*, (Heb. vi. 11. 2 Peter i. 5-11.) *Perseverance*, (Hos. vi. 3.) *on our part*; *Affliction*, (Zech. xiii. 9.) *The gift of the Spirit*, (Rom. viii. 16. 1 John iii. 21; iv. 13.) *on God's part*—are the means of its attainment. *Active devotedness*. (Isaiah vi. 6-8.) *Support in temptation*, (Job xix. 21-25.) *in suffering*, (2 Tim. i. 12.) and *in the prospect of eternity*, (2 Cor. v. 1. 2 Tim. iv. 6-8.) are its blessed results.

It is evidently, therefore, our Father's will, that his children's complete acceptance should not be with them a matter of present uncertainty. He intends—not only that they should reach heaven at last, but that heaven should commence on earth in a state of conscious security and peace—not only that *they should have eternal life*, but that *they should know that they have it*. (1 John v. 13.) The Gospel—instead of forbidding this privilege—warrants, produces, and establishes it; for the conviction of the professor, the excitement of the slumbering, and the encouragement of the weak.

Yet we must not so identify assurance with faith, as to conclude all that are destitute of it to be unbelievers. It springs indeed from faith, and can grow upon no other root. All the practical principles connected with it are the fruits of faith. "The promise of the Spirit," by whom the privilege is applied, "is received by faith." (Gal. iii. 14.) The want of assurance also is, in fact, a want of faith. It is the soul seeking "confidence in the flesh," instead of "rejoicing in Christ Jesus." The revolting view of its own sin, *unconnected with the covering of the atonement*, produces despondency instead of assurance. Whereas, on the other hand, a clear apprehension of the doctrines of the Gospel is always a ground for the exercise of faith, and a means of establishing Christian confidence.

And yet, unless we separate between *the principle*, and *the conscious interest in the objects of faith*, we shall, in a spirit of evangelical self-righteousness, rest our salvation—not upon faith as a means of laying hold of Christ, but upon some feeling or sensation of our own mind. Besides the Old Testament saints occasionally lost their *consciousness of the Divine favor*—that is, *their assurance* (Job xiii. 24; xix. 11. Psalm xlii. 1; xxxi. 22; lxxvii. 7-9; lxxxviii. 7, 14-16); while "the root of the matter"—*the root of faith*—was still "in them." With the disciples—while they were ingrafted *by faith*, as living branches of the true vine—*the privilege of assurance was prospective*. (John xv. 1-5, with xiv. 20.) Faith, as a means of salvation does not seem necessarily to imply an *appropriating interest in the Gospel*. (John i. 49, 50. Acts viii. 37. Rom. x. 9. 1 John v. 1.) The Apostles exhort to assurance those "who had obtained like precious faith with them." (2 Peter i. 1-10.) They write to *sincere believers*, that they might be assured *believers*—plainly distinguishing between *believing unto life*, and "knowing that we have life," and defining assurance to be rather *the strengthened exercise of the essential principle of faith*. (1 John v. 13.) They separate again between *faith as the result of hearing*, and the sealing of the Spirit, i. e. *assurance—as the consequence of faith* (Eph. i. 13); as also between "the things that are freely given to us of God," and our *knowledge or perception of them by the Spirit of God*. (1 Cor. ii. 12.) And is our knowledge of these free gifts always distinct? Have we no part in them, till we have fully cleared up our interest in them? And does the right of the heir depend upon his consciousness of the validity of his title?—The "command" *instantly* to "believe on the name of Jesus Christ," is indeed as binding upon

167. *My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.* 168. *I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.*

THOSE only, who have *hoped in the Lord's salvation*, can express this joyful delight in his *precepts*. The Christian does not

us all, as any part of the Decalogue. (John vi. 28, 29. 1 John iii. 23.) But as faith is the *means of obtaining forgiveness* (Acts x. 43; xiii. 38, 39; xxvi. 18.)—if it be supposed to imply a *persuasion of forgiveness*, it would involve the absurdity of believing *that we are accepted, that we may be accepted*. Thus forgiveness would be made to precede faith, instead of being the result of it. Again—as faith is the instrument, by which we are ingrafted into Christ, (John xv. 4.) and brought into this state of acceptance, we must have *faith*, before we can be in this state—consequently before we can *have assurance that we are in it*. Faith therefore must be supposed separable from, and antecedent to, assurance. Thus also—if assurance be correctly defined—“*knowing whom we have believed,*” (2 Tim. i. 12.)—consciousness supposes the previous exercise of faith on its object—that is—*faith preceding assurance*.

Now do many of the exercises of faith recorded in the Gospels exhibit distinct marks of assurance. Sense of need, desire, use of the appointed means, and a spirit of dependence mainly characterized the applicants for the Saviour's mercy—Doubts of his willingness (Mat. viii. 2, 3.) or his ability (Mark ix. 22.) often mingled themselves with the sincere workings of faith. Our Lord himself seemed to consider the centurion's case as an exception. (Matt. viii. 8–10.) Seldom did dependence amount to *certainity*; and *appropriation* was generally rather the result than the principle of the application.

“The assurance of faith”—as it properly respects a *dependence upon the record*—is indeed the essential principle of Christian life. But “the assurance of hope”—a *conscious interest in the record—the real privilege of assurance*—seems to be a distinct and separable idea. The truth of the record—“*Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out*”—may be implicitly received; yet a *consciousness of coming, or of having come*, may be much obscured by negligence, self-righteousness, indistinct perception of the acts of faith, or the power of unbelief in some of its various forms. Consequently, there will be doubt of an interest in the record—a *want of assurance*. For the Bible is not “the Lamb's Book of Life”—the register of the elect of God. No man can, therefore, bring from thence a direct testimony of his personal salvation. His character—not his name—is in the record. The declaration is—“*He that believeth*”—not *any particular individual mentioned by name*—“shall be saved.” No man is commanded in the first instance to believe that Christ died for *him individually—but for such as he is*—for the unworthy, the guilty, the condemned, the perishing. This is the warrant of his own application, the event of which will—*ultimately, if not immediately*—be appropriation and assurance.

We are deeply convinced, that a lowered exhibition of this precious doctrine and inestimable privilege has greatly deteriorated the standard of Evangelical religion. The objections against it are founded in ignorance or misconception. Instead of *savoring of presumption*, it is the very principle of humility. It is the reception of the divine testimony without *reasoning or disputation*. Whereas doubting may be justly considered (to use an anomalous term) *proud humility*. For does not the doubt on account of our *unworthiness, imply a secret dependence on worthiness as a ground of acceptance? Nor again, does assurance militate against the influence of godly fear*—which was never meant to impair the certainty of our faith, but to guard us against carnal security and self-confidence. We work out our salvation “*with fear and trembling,*” upon the ground of assurance—that is upon the *appropriating confidence of God “working all our works in us.”* (Phil. ii. 12, 13. Isaiah xxvi. 12.) The assured hope of the Gospel is the *principle*—not the *hindrance*—of godly fear. (Heb. xii. 28.) Indeed we must consider this doctrine, scripturally stated, to be the life of present privilege, and the spring of practical devotedness. Where, therefore, it is defectively set forth—or scarcely set forth at all—or guarded with an over-anxious care against abuse—the privilege is but little known, and the springs of active love are weak and uncertain. And thus believers too often, in a languid and highly sinful state of unbelief, acquiesce in a feeble exercise of this vital principle, indolently yielding up all effort for a vigorous and healthy habit of faith. They go about their duties, like an expiring person about his work; agitated about the business of the moment; while the desirableness of health and strength, the Physician and the remedy, are given up in despondency. Their case is perfectly recoverable by due attention to the appointed means, and to the real nature and symptoms of their disease. Yet they sit down in the miserable and degrading conclusion, that their powers are paralyzed; and though they may preserve the notion of spiritual life, and the hope of salvation at last; yet they think they must be content to be feeble, comfortless, and unprofitable.

acknowledge the popular separation of duty and privilege, according as it may be constraint or indulgence to his inclination. Every part

Much injury has also arisen from restricting the privilege of assurance to the maturity of Christian experience. Does not the Apostle place it at the very threshold of the Gospel, when he wrote to "little children—because their sins were forgiven them for Christ's name's sake?" (1 John ii. 2.) And ought we not, after the inspired pattern, to "desire every one to give diligence," in pressing towards this mark? (Heb. vi. 11.) Diligence—as the habit of faith—is the appointed mean: sloth—as the fruit of unbelief—the main hindrance to its attainment. (Heb. vi. 11, 12.) It is undoubtedly the equal and common privilege of the youngest as well as the oldest member of the family of God; and (though unbelief, sloth, or backsliding may for a while preclude the enjoyment of it) it is linked to the first, as well as to any successive exercise of faith—to its most trembling, as well as its most collected, act. (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) Indeed the first genuine act of faith is at least as strenuous as any subsequent act; and perseverance in this act, where the hand is trembling, is often the characteristic of the greatest decision, courage, and maturity. All, therefore, should be exhorted to assurance; nor should the youngest be satisfied without the attainment of it. Many realize it at a very early stage of experience. And where they fall short of it, it is not from defect in the object, or in the warrant—but in the mean. The exhibition of the work of Christ is not appropriated with that simplicity, which brings with it "joy and peace in believing." See Acts viii. 5, 8, 39; xvi. 31. 1 Thess. i. 6.

We cannot, however, absolutely identify faith and assurance. Adoption into the family of God "by faith" (Gal. iii. 25.) does not, as we conceive, depend upon, nor is it in all cases connected with, *consciousness* of this relation. A child may be fully assured of his interest in the family, and title to the patrimony. But while an infant—when his relation and interest were as complete as at any subsequent period—he had no such consciousness. And thus many of the dear children of God have no consciousness that they are so; yet they cry, they long, they walk—or they try to walk—as children; and so they evince that they are children. Or (to use another illustration) we may have light sufficient to distinguish objects, and to guide us on our way; while yet we do not see clearly, and therefore cannot possibly be conscious that we see clearly. What judgment, we may also ask, must we form of those distressing cases of constitutional infirmity, the characteristic of which is not so much positive unbelief, (though the symptoms may present a mixture of this principle) as a want of mental power (often sudden and unaccountable,) to apprehend the objects of faith in any distinct Gospel relation? They cannot be seen in their true light and bearing. The spiritual optics, though not destroyed, are greatly obscured; so that the eye of sense and natural conscience fills the retina of contemplation with its own false views. This is a very different case from spiritual indolence, or want of laboriously distinct statement—that is—where the view of the elementary materials is clear, and wants only the exercise of industry in the arrangement of them. This is the state of a person in a swoon—not of a corpse. The principle of life is not extinct, though the consciousness of it is wholly wanting, and may continue so for some time.

If, again, assurance be the *essential principle of faith*, then faith can never be conceived in an imperfect state, or connected with any variation of growth or declension, or of spiritual intelligence. All that are destitute of it, must also be in a state of unbelief. We have therefore to account for the strange anomaly of *unbelievers*, "knowing the plague of their own hearts," hating sin, separate from the world, and renewed in heart, temper, life, and conduct. For such unquestionably are many, who—though kept in bondage by their doubts and fears, and far from having attained a conscious interest in Christ—are yet (upon this supposition) *bringing forth the fruits of faith upon the root of unbelief*? Is not this a stumbling to the unconverted? Is it not rather "despising" than cherishing "the day of small things"? Is it not "breaking" rather than binding up "the bruised reed"? Let us pray for faith to receive and to exhibit "the fulness of the blessing"—"the high calling" and consequent responsibilities; but let us not shut the "little ones" out of the camp. Like Jacob of old—and after the pattern of a more wise and tender shepherd than he—we must "gently lead those that are with young." (Gen. xxxiii. 13, 14. Isaiah xi. 11.)

The Scripture seems therefore fully to warrant the distinction prevalent among the Puritan divines—that assurance is "necessary to the Christian—for his well-being, not for his being;" for his consolation and establishment, not for his salvation. For our own part—though we would not scruple to say, "He that believeth not shall be damned," (Mark xvi. 16.)—we dare not say, 'He that is not assured shall be damned.' There can be no peace without some conscious liberty to call God our own. And to be satisfied

of his walk identifies these terms of distinction. If it is his *duty*, it is no less his *privilege*, to *love the precepts*. Nothing holds him to them—nothing enables him thoroughly to *keep them*, but love. All resolutions, vows, covenants, would be as ineffectual to bind him, as the green withs to fasten the giant.¹ David had not “*done the commandments*” from constraint; but “*his soul kept them* ;” yea, he “*loved them exceedingly*.”² Indeed, the bias of the new nature to “*keep the precepts*,” is as prevalent as that of the old nature to break them. Once the believer would have wished the law of God blotted out of the universe, or at least exchanged for a more indulgent dispensation. But now that it is written in his heart, even its restraint is delightful to him; and as he gains a clearer intimacy with it, and a closer discernment of its spirituality, he “*loves it exceedingly*.” Not one indeed of the “*precepts or testimonies*” does he “*keep*” as he ought, and as he desires; but there is not one of them, that he does not delight in, and most anxiously desire to fulfil. Thus every feature of the Divine image is inwrought in the soul—beautiful in its place and proportion; and all other graces grow in connection with *love to the testimonies*.

Nor let our consciousness of daily failures restrain this strong expression of confidence. The most humble believer need not hesitate to adopt it ‘as an evidence of grace—not as a claim of merit.’³ This frequent repetition⁴ marks the godly jealousy of the man of God—mindful of his own self-deceitfulness and manifold infirmities—“giving” careful “diligence” to “make his calling and election sure.”⁵ David knew himself to be a poor sinner; but he was conscious of spirituality of obedience, “*exceeding love*” to the word, and an habitual walk under the eye of his God—the evidences of a heart (often mentioned in the Old Testament⁶) “perfect with him.” ‘Christ alone kept the old law, and he enables us to observe the new.’⁷

This active love to the word should be cultivated on the principle of our public walk before God. We must not study the Scripture merely for our present gratification, or to furnish materials for our Christian intercourse. We ought rather, from every step in the history of Christ, as well as from the more finished course of instruction in the Epistles, to be gathering some help to “set the

without the exercise of freedom, is to rob God and ourselves. Yet let not the trembling soul conclude too hastily against itself, from the want of this assurance. Let him search into the grounds of his confidence. Let him appropriate the testimony in simplicity. Let him yield to it the obedience of faith; and let him not doubt, but that in the Lord’s best time and way; he will be able to record his profession of trust—*I know whom I have believed.* (2 Tim. i. 12.)

¹ Judg. xvi. 7—9.

² Verses 48, 97, 127.

³ Bishop Horne.

⁴ Thrice in these three successive verses.

⁵ 2 Peter i. 5—10.

⁶ Compare ver. 1, Margin; 2 Chron. xv. 17; xvi. 9; 2 Kings xx. 3. The import of the term is limited and explained by the word “upright” united with it, Job i. 8; Psalm xxxvii. 37. The Scripture use of the word perhaps refers rather to our desires than our attainments. (Compare Phil. iii. 12—15); and in general seems to mark Christian maturity, as contrasted with the weakness of the babe, and the inexperience of the young man in Christ. Compare the use of the same word *τελειος* in 1 Cor. ii. 6; xiv. 20. Heb. v. 14.

⁷ Bishop Horne.

Lord always before us,"¹—realizing the interest that he takes in us, and his presence with us as our Father, Governor, Teacher, Comforter, Friend.

Now, let us ask—Do our "souls" thus "*keep the Lord's testimonies*" habitually, perseveringly? Does conscience testify, that, with all our defects and sinful mixture, they are uppermost in our minds; that our love rises above the worldly rules of expediency, prudence, or the example of those around us—(the too common measurement of scanty obedience)—as if it could never burn with sufficient fervor in his service, "who loved us, and gave himself for us?"² Why, then, should we shrink from this acknowledgment of "simplicity and godly sincerity?" If we are ready to own, that "without Christ we can do nothing;" that his Spirit "has wrought all our works in us;"³ that by the grace of God we are what we are;⁴ that our hope of acceptance is *grounded only* upon the finished work on the cross—why should we refuse to confess the grace of God in us? Yet we must not forget, that allowed unfaithfulness, neglect of secret prayer, impurity of motive, or any "iniquity regarded in the heart"—though they will not loosen the ground of our hope—will obscure the comfort of our Christian confidence. How beautiful is that princely spirit, which will not serve the Lord "of that which doth cost us nothing;"⁵ that not only longs for holiness as the way to heaven; but loves heaven the better for the holy way that leads to it, and for the perfect holiness that reigns there eternally!

But never let us lose sight of the recollection, that "*all our ways are before God!*" that every act, every thought, every desire, every word, is registered by conscience as his vicegerent, and laid up in his book of remembrance! Well would it be for us, if we walked less before men, and more "*before God;*" if in secret, in business, at home and abroad, we heard the solemn voice—"I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be thou perfect."⁶ We may be unprovable in the sight of men, while it is a mere artificial walk, grounded upon base external principles—a "walking after the flesh"—not *before God*. Even the engagements of active duty may be the subtle snare of the great enemy to divert us from intense personal religion; to spoil the hidden walk of communion with God, by concentrating the mind upon a more public, and, apparently, a more useful walk. Thus too often the vital principle of religion sinks into a stated formal habit. "Walking with God"⁷ is the secret spring of the Christian. Walking before God is the manifestation and the exercise of the hidden principle. For in all things, private as well as public, the most trivial as well as the most weighty, to have our eye fixed in dutiful reverence upon the Omniscient, Omnipresent eye of Jehovah—what solemnity would it give to our whole behavior! what influence would it have upon our public professions, our general conversation, our secret duties!

¹ Psalm xvi. 8. ² Gal. ii. 20. ³ Isaiah xxvi. 12, with John xv. 5. ⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 10.
⁵ 2 Sam xxiv. 24. ⁶ Gen. xvii. 1. ⁷ Gen. v. 24; vi. 9.

We should be energetic in “serving our own generation by the will of God;”¹ and yet while walking before men, should be truly “walking before God”—*all our ways before him*—“done in his sight as to him”²—and accepted in his favor.

When, therefore, I am about to venture upon any line of conduct, let me consider the watchful eye, that pierces into the deepest recesses of my thoughts, and brings, as it were, to daylight my principles, my motives, and my ends. Above all, let me ever recollect, that he, “*before whom are all my ways,*” is He that hung upon the cross for my sins. Let me then walk, as if he were standing before me in all the endearing obligations of his love. Oh! do not I owe him sacrifice for sacrifice, heart for heart, life for life? Then surely I cannot be dead, insensible, sluggish in *keeping his precepts*. I cannot forbear to show this practical proof of my love to him.³ Let not, then, the fear of legality make me neglect this privilege of “keeping the commandments” of my beloved Master and Lord. Let me live under the solemn recollection—“Thou, God, seest me;”⁴ and in the joyful assurance—“Thou, God, lovest me;”⁵ and his ways will be to me holiness, happiness, heaven.

PART XXII.

169. *Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord: give me understanding, according to thy word.* 170. *Let my supplication come before thee; deliver me according to thy word.*

WE mark David here, where he always loved to be,—a suppliant at the throne of grace. Many had been his “*cries and supplications.*” His petition now is—that they may “*come near before his Lord.*” Oh! that our wants of every moment were felt with the same pressure, and carried to the Lord with the same faith, earnestness, humility, and perseverance! Richness of expression, and fluency of utterance, are the mere shell and shadow of prayer. The life of prayer is the “*cry*” of the heart to God. The eloquence of prayer is its earnestness. The power of prayer is that which cometh, not from education, or from the natural desire of the man; but that “*which is from above*”—“the spirit of supplication”—“the spirit of adoption.” The urgency of present need calls for instant prayer. The soul is at stake; the enemy is within the walls—perhaps within the citadel. Oh, what a privilege to know that we have “a strong habitation, whereunto we may continually

¹ Acts xiii. 36.

² Eph. vi. 7.

³ John xiv. 15.

⁴ Gen. xvi. 13, with John i. 48.

⁵ Jer. xxxi. 3, with John xiii. 1.

resort"—to be able to remind the Lord—" *Thou hast given commandment to save me ; for thou art my rock and my fortress !*"¹

But then we must see, that our "*cry comes before—comes near before the Lord ;*" that nothing blocks up the way, or interrupts the communication. If we are believers, the way is open ; "the middle wall of partition is broken down." Oh, let us be excited to greater nearness of communion ! "Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh,"² why should we be backward to come ? Had we not seen the way marked by this blood of sprinkling, we should (if we have had any sight into our own hearts) no more have dared to take one step into the awful presence of God, than to rush into the devouring flame. If, in a moment of extremity, we had felt, that we must pray or perish, we should have had no boldness to open our mouths before God,—much less expect that our "*supplication would come near before him,*" had we not been "made nigh by the blood of Christ."³ But what an amount of privilege is it, that this way to God is always open—that, as members of Christ, we stand in the sight of God as pure as Christ is pure—that we have not only "access" but "*access with confidence*"⁴—yea, with the same confidence as the Son of God himself ! For the Father is never weary of delighting in his dear Son, or in those who are one with him. If he, therefore, takes our names into the holy place—if he offer sacrifice and incense for us, and sprinkle us with his blood—"in him we are complete,"⁵—"in him," therefore, let us "glory."⁶ "Having an high-priest over the house of God ; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith."⁷

But where we feel as if we did not, could not, reach the throne of grace, "is there not a cause ?" Our distance from God must be traced to a deeper origin than the dulness and insensibility of our hearts. The real difficulty of prayer, and indeed the actual inability to pray, arises in many, and probably in most, cases, from an indistinct perception of the way of access. We must admit this, not only in those who are totally ignorant of Christ, but also in the cases of weak, unestablished, or negligent Christians. Through ignorance of the fulness and freeness of the Gospel in the one, and indulgence of sin or secret unwatchfulness in the other, the way of access (only perceptible by the eye of faith) becomes obscured, the desire faint, the spiritual strength weakened. And instead of the acknowledgment—"The Lord hath heard the voice of my supplications,"⁸ we have the mournful complaints—"My soul cleaveth to the dust—oh that I were as in months past !"⁹ It must be so ; for prayer without faith is a heartless ceremony in the spirit of bondage. That which gives to it life and acceptance is the believing

¹ Psalm lxxi. 3.

² Heb. x. 19, 20.

³ Eph. ii. 13.

⁴ Ib. iii. 12. Esther had "*access*" to the King—but not "*with confidence*"—iv. 16.

⁵ Col. ii. 10.

⁶ Isaiah xlv. 25.

⁷ Heb. x. 21, 22.

⁸ Psalm vi. 9.

⁹ Verse 25. Job. xxix. 2.

apprehension of Christ.¹ The ignorant and self-righteous may find it a matter of course (as easy as it is fruitless) to bow their knee in the form of prayer. But the light, that darts in upon the awakened conscience, reveals something hitherto unknown of God and of themselves, and shows the ground of confidence for a self-condemned sinner, to be a matter of the deepest mystery, and most amazing difficulty. Such a confidence, however, God has laid open to us. We cannot honor him more than by making use of it. All that come in the name of Jesus are welcome; why, then, penitent sinner, should not you be welcome? The throne of grace was raised for sinners such as you. You cannot want larger promises, or a better plea. You come, not because you are worthy, but because you are bid, to come. Take the command, and lay it upon your conscience. Christ is your only way to God. Faith is the act and exercise of coming to Christ. Faith, therefore, will bring you to God, if you have not hitherto come; or restore you to God, if you have wandered from him.

But there may be a secret departure from God even in the engagement of active service, or in the exercises of social religion. For if these duties are substituted for secret communion with God, "the things that remain in us will be ready to die;"² ordinances will fail to enrich; Christian fellowship will bring no refreshment; and the soul, while blessed with the abundance of means of grace, "in the fulness of its sufficiency will be in straits."³ Indeed, if our affections and feelings are moved in social exercises, and are cold and insensible when we are alone with God, it is a bad symptom of our state. What then do we know of the comforts of the closet? Do we pray, because we love to pray, or only because our consciences constrain us to the duty? Does the Lord mark those secret transactions with himself, that manifest our hearts to be really drawn to him? Is it any pressing business of our soul's salvation, that brings us to God? Are our services enlivened with spiritual manifestations of Christ? It is possible long to continue in the outward course of duty: and yet not one of our prayers to "*come near before the Lord.*" We have not come in the appointed way; and therefore we have not really come at all. Or if the name of Christ has been affixed to our prayers, it has been as a component part of a formal system, not as an exercise of dependence in seeking acceptance with God.

But it may be, that we have backslidden from God, in a habit of indulged coldness or wilful iniquity. Now if we would expect "the candle of the Lord again to shine upon our heads, and his secret to be upon our tabernacles,"⁴ we must rest satisfied with nothing short of the full restoration of our privileges. We must return to the Lord with deepened contrition in his appointed way, and wait for him to look upon us, and once more to "*let our supplication come near before him.*" He had "gone, and returned to his place, till we ac-

¹ Heb. iv. 14-16; x. 19-22.

² Rev. iii. 2.

³ Job xx. 22.

⁴ Job xxix. 3, 4.

knowledged our offence, and sought his face ;”¹ and he is now sitting on a “ throne of grace,” waiting “ that he may be gracious.”² Again and again, therefore, let us fall down at his feet, and never cease to pray, until we feel that our “ *cry and supplication come near before him,*” and spiritual “ *understanding of our case, and deliverance*” from our danger, are vouchsafed. As a God of wisdom and yearning mercy, we may trust him to “ perform all things for us.”³ Let him then judge for the time and means of our *deliverance*. Only let it be *according to his own word* of faithfulness, and we “ shall yet praise him.”⁴

It is beautiful to observe the oil of the Psalmist’s faith feeding the flame of his supplication. Every petition is urged upon the warrant of a promise—“ *according to thy word.*” The promises were the very breath of his supplication ; exciting his expectation for a favorable answer, and exercising his patience, until the answer should come. Though in possession of so comparatively small a portion of the blessed book, he seemed always to find a word for the present occasion ; always able to show to his God his own hand and seal. Alas ! sometimes with the whole word of God before us, we are at a loss to appropriate one of its innumerable promises to the present emergency. Yet with all our contracted views of the covenant, still our interest in it is not denied. Such is the condescension of our tender Father that he accepts even the stammering language of faith in his children ! The cry, “ Abba Father ”—“ though ” (as Luther sweetly expresses it) “ it is but a cry, yet it doth so pierce the clouds, that there is nothing else heard in heaven of God and his angels.”⁵ And how delightful is the thought, that God’s elect—as they will shortly be gathered a countless multitude around the heavenly throne⁶—so do they now hold spiritual communion with each other, while “ they cry day and night ”⁷ before their Father’s throne of grace ! True it is—we understand not one another’s tongues. Yet does our loving Father understand us all. Nor do our different dialects cause any confusion in heaven ; but rather unite and form one cloud of incense, ascending with continual acceptance and delight in his presence. Ineffable is the delight, with which our Beloved enjoys that communion with his people, which he purchased with his own blood—“ O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rocks, in the secret places of the stairs, *let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice ; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.*”⁸

¹ Hosea v. 15.

³ Psalm lvii. 2.

⁵ Luther on Gal. iv. 6. And again—“ This little word, Father, conceived effectually in the heart, passeth all the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero, and of the most eloquent rhetoricians that ever were in the world. This matter is not expressed with words, but with groanings ; which groanings cannot be uttered with any words of eloquence, for no tongue can express them.”

⁶ Rev. vii. 9.

⁷ Luke xviii. 7.

² Isaiah xxx. 18.

⁴ Ib. xlii. 11.

⁸ Can. ii. 14, also iv. 11.

171. *My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.*

How happy is it to bring to God a heart as large in praise as in prayer! The answer of the supplication for *spiritual understanding and deliverance* naturally issues in the sacrifice of praise. Guilt had sealed David's lips, while living in sin, and restrained alike the utterance of praise and prayer. But when awakened to a sense of his sin, how earnest were his cries!—"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise."¹ And if guilt or unbelief has made us dumb, his petitions will tune our hearts to the "songs of Zion." When *the Lord has taught us in his statutes* the revelation of himself—as having given his dear Son for us and to us, "the tongue of the dumb is made to sing,"²—"Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!"³

And do I not remember "the time of love," when I was "a brand plucked out of the fire"—a redeemed sinner—a pardoned rebel—destined for a seat on the throne of God—indulged with a taste, and assured of the completion of heavenly bliss? This was a work worthy of God—a work, which none but God could have wrought. What *mercy is this!* Everlasting! Unchangeable! Let me cast myself daily upon it; yea, let me bury myself in it! What gratitude is demanded! "*My lips shall utter praise, now that he has taught me his statutes.*" "O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me."⁴

Again—I seemed to have sunk beyond all help. No means, no ministers, no providences, could reach my extremity. All were "physicians of no value;"⁵ tried and tried again, but tried in vain. But "in weakness" thoroughly felt "strength was made perfect."⁶ The threatening clouds were dispersed; the breaches were healed; the veil of unbelief was rent. "The right hand of the Lord had brought mighty things to pass"⁷—"He hath spoken unto me, and himself hath done it;"⁸ and it is "marvellous in our eyes."⁹ Let my stammering "*lips utter praise.*" What a display of *power!* It is the spark preserved in the ocean unquenched, the drop in the flames unconsumed—the feather in the storm unshaken. "Who is a God like unto thee!" "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory."¹⁰

And again—I was perplexed in a dark and bewildered path. Every dispensation appeared to frown upon me. One dark hour had blotted out all the recollections of my former comforts; and it was as if I never could, never should, rejoice again. But little did I think how the Lord was "abounding towards me in all wisdom and prudence"¹¹—how his arrows were sharpened with love—how he was "humbling me, and proving me, to know what was in my

¹ Psalm li. 12, 15.

² Isaiah xxxv. 6.

³ 2 Cor. ix. 15.

⁴ Isaiah xii. 1.

⁵ Job xiii. 4.

⁶ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

⁷ Psalm cxviii. 16, prayer-book version.

⁸ Isaiah xxxviii. 15.

⁹ Psalm cxviii. 23.

¹⁰ Micah vii. 18. Psalm cxv. 1.

¹¹ Eph. i. 8.

heart,"¹ and in the moment of chastening was speaking to me—I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord: thoughts of peace, and not of evil, "*to give you an expected end.*"² What a display of "*wisdom!*" "*My lips shall utter praise;*" for if I "should hold my peace, the stones would immediately cry out."³

The thought what I was before my conversion—what I have been since—what I am now—overwhelms me with shame and with praise. "Lord, how is it that thou shouldst have manifested to me, as thou hast not unto the world?" "Who am I, O Lord God, that thou hast brought me hitherto!" And how much more "that thou hast spoken of thy servant for a great while to come!"⁴ For thou hast prepared for me a happy eternity in thy unclouded presence. Should not then my praise be bubbling up as from a fountain⁵—pouring forth as from a rich treasure house?⁶ Should not my instrument—if not always employed—be always kept in tune?⁷ Yes—when I am most deploring my sins, never let me fail to thank the Lord, that he has not taken away his truth *utterly*—that he has left me clinging to some twig of hope, instead of leaving me to find—what many who look very calm have found—the depth of this precipice of despair. And has not the time been with you—believer—when you have been almost ready to give up all for lost, and to say, "Evil be thou my good," and when the thought flashed light and comfort, 'While I am struggling between despondency and rebellion, and too hard—too cold—too discouraged to look up, my blessed Saviour is pitying and succoring me in my struggle. Then let me put off despair *at least till to-morrow*'—and before to-morrow's dawn the cloud was swept away.

Ought not we then to glorify our Saviour—a privilege as high as to enjoy him—nay—the very means of increasing our enjoyment of him, in the active excitement of my love, and every grace for his sake. Let not the enemy rob me, as too often he has done, of my high privilege. Let me prize secret prayer. Let me be separated from an ensnaring world. Let me dread separation from my God—and if ever estranged from him, let me never rest, until by "receiving the atonement," always presented and accepted on my behalf, I once more walk in the light of his countenance. Let me then fix the eye of my faith, weak and dim as it may be, constantly upon Jesus. He must do all for me, in me, by me. He must "*teach*" me more and more of "*the statutes*" of my God, that my heart may be delightfully engaged with "*my lips in uttering his praise.*"

172. *My tongue shall speak of thy word; for all thy commandments are righteousness.*

To speak of God and for him, will be the desire and delight of him, whose heart and lips have been taught to "*utter praise.*"

¹ Deuteronomy viii. 2.

² Jer. xxix. 11.

³ Luke xix. 40.

⁴ 2 Sam. vii. 18. 19.

⁵ Psalm xlvi. M. R.

⁶ Matt. xii. 34.

⁷ Psalm lvii. 7; cviii. 1.

Yet alas! how seldom is "our conversation seasoned with grace!"¹ So much of this poor world's nothing! So little of Jesus! If only five minutes can be redeemed for prayer—for Scripture—or for thought—let it be seized as an inestimable jewel. If we can pass five minutes less in foolish or ensnaring company, secure the advantage. If vain words are flowing up from the bottom, look on the restraint that represses them from our lips as a triumphant mercy. This active energy of Christian discipline will communicate a fragrance to our conversation, most acceptable to our Beloved Lord;² and will make our "lips" enriching,³ feeding,⁴ and instructive⁵ to his church. And truly when we see how hardly men judge of him—how they count his "commandments grievous," and his ways "unequal,"⁶ it will be delightful to bear our testimony, that "*all his commandments are righteousness*"—restraining the power of sin, and conforming the soul to his image.

"Lord, open thou my lips, that my *tongue may speak of thy word.*" Honor me, O my God, by helping me to show, that "*all thy commandments are righteousness.*" In our own atmosphere, and our own spirit, how often do we pour out our words without waiting on the Lord for unction and power—speaking of the things of God without his presence and blessing! Were we living fully in the atmosphere and breathing of prayer—enriched with habitual meditation in the word—how much more fluent would our tongue be to *speak of his word* "to the use of edifying!"⁷ It would be made really our own—known experimentally—and then how cheering, how enlivening the conversation of the man of God! His "light so shines before men, that" they are constrained to "glorify his Father which is in heaven."⁸

Perhaps, believer, *supposed* inability, natural bashfulness, or want of seasonable opportunity may restrain your lips. But under most unfavorable circumstances something may generally be said or done in the service of God. And whilst it is well carefully to watch against the "talk of the lips, which tendeth only to penury;"⁹ beware, lest, through the scrupulous tenderness of conscience, "Satan get advantage" to shut the mouth of the faithful witnesses of God, and thus to weaken that cause, which it is your first desire to support.¹⁰ Guard against the influence of unbelief. Bring your weakness and inability daily to the Lord. Let any dreaded inconsistency of profession be searched out, examined, and lamented before him, and opposed in dependence on his grace; but never let it be made a covering for indolence, or supply fuel for despondency. Consider how your interest in a Divine Saviour makes your way open to bring all your wants to him. Be encouraged therefore to ask for the Spirit of God to guide your lips: that a poor weak sin-

¹ Col. iv. 6.

² Can. iv. 11.

³ Prov. x. 20.

⁴ Ib. v. 21.

⁵ Prov. xv. 7.

⁶ Ezek. xviii. 25.

⁷ Eph. iv. 29, with Col. iii. 16.

⁸ Matt. v. 16.

⁹ Prov. xiv. 23.

¹⁰ It was an excellent saying of Archbishop Usher, when in the society of his friends—
'A word of Christ before we part.'

ner may be permitted to "show forth the praises of Him," who is surrounded with all the Hosts of Heaven.

When however our silence has arisen from the too feeble assistance of our natural carelessness and indolence, the recollection of many important opportunities of glorifying our Saviour, lost beyond recall, may well excite the prayer—"Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness."¹ Oh! to have the preciousness of souls deeply impressed upon our hearts! Oh! for that compassionate love, that would never suffer us to meet a fellow-sinner, without lifting up our hearts to God on his behalf: making an effort to win his soul to Christ: and manifesting an earnest desire for his salvation! What loss is there to our own souls in these neglected opportunities of blessing the souls of others! For never do we receive richer fruit to ourselves, than in the act or endeavor to communicate to others. The heart becomes enlarged by every practical exercise of Christian love. Yet much simplicity—much unction from above—much tenderness of heart—much wisdom combined with boldness—is needed in our daily conversation, that we may "make manifest the savor of the knowledge of Christ in every place;"² and specially—that our very desires to bring sinners to the Gospel may proceed—not from a goading conscience, much less from pride and vain glory—but from the pure source of love to Christ and to our fellow-sinners. For even if we are as "full of matter" as Elihu³ was, nothing will be said for God—nothing, that will "minister grace to the hearers," unless the influence of the Divine Spirit fills our hearts,⁴ as "a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life,"⁵—a blessing to all around us.

173. *Let thy hand help me: for I have chosen thy precepts.*

DAVID, having engaged himself to a bold profession of his God, now comes to seek his needful supply of "help."—"Let thine hand help me." And if we may "come to the throne of grace," that we may find "grace to help in time of need,"⁶ when should we not come? For is not every moment a "time of need," such as may quicken us to flee to the "strong tower," whither "the righteous runneth, and is safe?"⁷ Besieged without; betrayed within: "wrestling against flesh and blood," and yet not against flesh and blood only;⁸ disputing every inch of ground, yet often discouraged by the little ground we seem to gain; surely we need all the help of Omnipotence to sustain us in the tremendous conflict. We may plead our "choice of his precepts," in looking for his "help."⁹ David had before "taken the testimonies of God as his heritage"¹⁰—including all the precious promises of the Gospel, extending to every necessity of time, and to every prospect for eternity. He

¹ Psalm li. 14.

² 2 Cor. ii. 14.

³ Compare Job. xxxii. 18—20.

⁴ Comp. Eph. v. 18, 19. ⁵ John iv. 14.

⁶ Heb. iv. 16.

⁷ Prov. xviii. 10.

⁸ Eph. vi. 12.

⁹ Verse 94.

¹⁰ Verse 111.

now confesses his obligation—"in *choosing the precepts*"—a happy choice—the influence of the Spirit upon his heart.¹

This choice is the distinctive mark of the Lord's people²—the exercise of a well-instructed and deliberate judgment—prompt obedience in the simplicity of faith. It is *the choice of all the precepts*—no other than the voluntary acknowledgment of our baptismal obligations. Many carnal suggestions offer themselves, the moment that the purpose is forming into the choice. "The things that were gain to us," and which now must be "counted loss for Christ,"³ (should we allow their weight in the balance at this crisis) will bring much hesitation and perplexity. Conferences "with flesh and blood" are most subtle hindrances to Christian determination.⁴ "What will the world say? If I go too far, I shall give offence; I shall lose all my influence—and blast all my prospects of eventual benefit to those around me. The apprehension also of losing the affection, and of incurring the displeasure, of those whom my heart holds dear, is most fearful. And then, this sacrifice is too costly to make; that pleasure too hard to resign." Such thoughts—the injections of the tempter—are ever at the door; and even when effectual resistance is offered, the struggle is often most severe. But it is such a mighty help in this conflict, when one desire has taken sole possession of the heart—"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do;"⁵ when we are so crucified to worldly influence, whether of pleasure, profit, fear, or esteem, as to be ready to act upon the resolution—"Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh."⁶ Now the heavenly beauty of the religion of the Gospel breaks in upon us.

Experience of our own weakness, and of the great power of the world, is gradually preparing us for victory over it. We shall then most specially find our happiness in losing our own will; and our Master's cross will be a delightful burden—like wings to a bird, or sails to a ship—assisting, instead of retarding, our course. The more we trust to his help and guidance in everything, the more we shall be able to do, and the more delightful will his service be to us.

The want of a determined choice is the secret of the halting profession that prevails among us. A compromise is attempted with the world. "The offence of the cross" begins to "cease." A middle path of serious religion is marked out, divested of what is called *needless offensiveness*—forgetting, that the religion that pleases the world will never be acceptable with God; nor can the religion that pleases God be ever accommodated to the inclination of the world. Oh! we shall do well to consider, whether the way of "*the Lord's precepts*" may not be found too hard, too strait, too unfrequented—whether we are prepared to brave the pointed finger and whispered scoff of the ungodly—and, perhaps, the mistaken opposition

¹ See Ezek. xi. 19, 20.

⁴ Compare Gal. i. 16.

² Isaiah lvi. 4.

⁵ Acts ix. 6.

³ Phil. iii. 7.

⁶ 2 Cor. v. 16.

of beloved friends.¹ Often has the profession of Christ been hastily taken up and relinquished.² He that wishes to abide by it, must daily learn this lesson—"Without me ye can do nothing:"³ and, in conscious helplessness, he will often breathe the cry—"Let thine hand help me."

Nor is this petition needful only in the first determination of this choice. In the growing and more decided conviction of its superior happiness, and in the daily endeavor to live in it, we shall find increasing need for the same acknowledgment of helplessness, and the same cry for support. Dependence is a principle of deep humility and mighty energy. The thought that we are entering into the work in the Lord's strength is a great stay. Blessed indeed is that helplessness, that makes us lie in the bosom of our Saviour, supported and cherished. Blessed be God for the "help laid" for us "upon one that is mighty;"⁴ so that our insufficiency and all-sufficiency are visible at one glance; and "when we are" most "weak, then are we" most "strong!"⁵ "They that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, 'Fear not, I will help thee.'⁶

174. *I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.*

BEFORE we close this Psalm, let us dwell once more upon this word—salvation. Common as its use, to the believer it has a constant freshness and an infinite meaning. Do we wonder at his *longing for it*? *Look at its fulness*—including all the mercy of the everlasting covenant. *Look at its ground*—that work of Calvary's cross once "finished,"⁷ and leaving nothing to be filled up or improved; standing out in all its glorious completeness; constraining the admiration, and encouraging the confidence, of the chief of sinners; but wholly disclaiming all assistance from the most eminent saint. *Look at its simplicity*—not keeping the sinner aloof from the Saviour—not hedging up or bewildering the open freeness of his path, but bringing him immediate peace and joy in resting upon the great atonement of the Gospel.⁸ *Mark its unchangeableness*—independent of and above all frames and feelings, so that, while "walking in darkness" we can "stay upon our God,"⁹ expecting salvation even from the hand that seems ready for our destruction¹⁰—leaving it to our heavenly Father to frown or to smile—to change as he pleaseth from the one to the other—and looking at every aspect of his countenance, as only a different arrangement of the same features of ineffable paternity; and the different, suitable, and seasonable expression of unchangeable covenant love.

Is not this an object for the *longing* of the soul, that feels its

¹ Compare Luke xiv. 26.

³ John xv. 5.

⁴ Psalm lxxxix. 19.

² Comp. Matt. viii. 19, 20.

⁵ 2 Cor. xii. 10.

⁸ Isaiah xli. 12, 13. Compare the whole passage, verses 10—16.

⁷ John xix. 30.

⁶ See Acts ii. 37—47; viii. 5—8, 39; xvi. 31—34. 1 Thess. i. 6.

⁹ Isaiah l. 10.

¹⁰ Job xiii. 15.

own pressing wants, and sees in this *salvation* an instant and full supply? This *longing* marks the character of evangelical religion—not merely duty, but *delight*. The mind wearies in the continued exertion *for duty*; but it readily falls in with *delight*. Duties become privileges, when Christ is their source and life. Thus every step of progress is progress in happiness. The world's all to the believer is really nothing. It presents nothing to feed the appetite, or quench the thirst of an immortal soul. Indeed the creatures were commissioned to withhold consolation, until every desire was concentrated in the single object, "Thou, O God, art the thing that I long for"¹—until the sinner has found rest in the answer to his prayer—"Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."² And now he enjoys his earthly comforts, "as not abusing them,"³ because he loves them as God would have them loved, and *longs for his salvation* above them all. This is true religion—when the Lord of all occupies that place in the heart, which he fills in the universe—*There* he is "All in all." *Here* the believer cries—"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee?"⁴ O what a privilege is it to have him in heart, in thought, and in view; to be rejoicing in his presence; and to be longing for a more full conformity to his image, and for a more lively enjoyment of his love! If this be but earth, what must heaven be! This *longing* is a *satisfactory evidence of the work of God*.⁵ It exercises the soul in habitual contemplation of the Saviour, in nearer communion with him, and supreme "*delight in his law*." Such desires will be unutterably increased, and infinitely satisfied 'in the fruition of his glorious Godhead.'⁶

But the Lord often brings this charge against his professing people—"Thou hast left thy first love."⁷ The principle is not dead, but the energy is decayed. Human nature is prone to apostasy. Slumber unconsciously steals upon the soul. Faith is not in *habitual* exercise. The attraction of the Saviour is not set forth. His love is not meditated upon. The soul is satisfied with former affections to him. There is little heart to labor for him. The means of communion with him are slighted; the heart naturally becomes cold in spiritual desires, and warm in worldly pursuits; and too often without any smittings of conscience for divided love.

Some professors, indeed, consider this declension of affections to be a matter of course. The young convert is supposed to abound most in love, and, as he advances, his fervor gradually subsides into matured judgment. Those indeed, who "have no root in themselves," lose their lively affections, and their religion with them.⁸ But surely the *real* principle of love cannot decay; that is, our esteem of God cannot be lowered: our "*longing for his salva-*

¹ Psalm lxxi. 4. P. T.

² Ib. xxxv. 3.

³ 1 Cor. vii. 31.

⁴ Psalm lxxiii. 25.

⁵ See Neh. i. 11.

⁶ Collect for Epiphany.

⁷ Revelations ii. 4.

⁸ See Matt. xxii. 20, 21.

tion" cannot languish; our delight in its enjoyment cannot diminish, without guilt and loss to our souls. He claims our love,¹ and it is most unreasonable to deny him his own. He is the same, as when we first loved him. *Then* we thought him worthy of our highest love. Do we now repent of having loved him so much? Have we found him less than our expectations? Can we bestow our heart elsewhere with stricter justice, or to better advantage? Do not all the grounds of our love to him continue in full force? Have they not rather increased every day and hour? What would an indulgent husband think of incessant and increasing attentions repaid with diminished affection? Oh! let us be ashamed of our indolence, and "remember" the times, when *our longings for his salvation* were more intense; when our communion with him was more heavenly: when we were ready to labor and suffer for him, and even to die to go home to his presence. Let us "repent" with deeper contrition, and "do our first works;"² never resting till we can take up afresh the language of delight—"I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord."

Some, however, of the Lord's dear children are distressed in the conscious coldness of their spiritual affections. But if it be a mark of the decay of grace to "lose our first love," it is at least a mark of the truth of grace to mourn over this loss. There is always a blessing for those "that hunger and thirst after righteousness."³ These restless desires are the beating pulse of the hidden life; and if there be not always a *sensible* growth of desire and enjoyment, there may be (as with the trees in winter) growth at the root, in a more fixed habit of grace and love, in a deeper spirit of humility, and in a more established self-knowledge and simplicity. Yet the shortest way of peace will be to look off from our "*longing for this salvation,*" to the "*salvation*" itself.⁴ For nothing is more desecrating to this great work—nothing is more paralyzing to its saving power, than the incorporating with it the admixture of our own experience as the ground of hope. The most Christian feelings must find no place at the foundation. Indeed their continual variation renders them, especially in the hour of temptation, very uncertain. Yet amid all this fluctuation, Christ may always be safely trusted. While, therefore, our coldness humbles us before him, let not brooding despondency cover his precious cross from view. Let not our eyes be so filled with tears of contrition, as to obscure the sight of his free and full salvation. "Looking" singly "unto Jesus" as our peace and our life, is at once our duty, our safety, and the secret principle of our daily progress heavenward. We shall but realize the perception of our own emptiness in the contemplation of his unbounded fulness.

But the connection between "*longing for salvation,*" and "*delight in the law,*" is at least an incidental evidence, that right apprehensions of "*salvation,*" must be grounded upon the word or

¹ See Prov. xxiii. 26.

² See Rev. ii. 5.

³ Matt. v. 6.

⁴ See Hebrews xii. 2.

"*law of God*;" and that a religion of feeling is a religion of delusion. Our *delight* is not only *in his love*, but *in his law*. And so practical is Christian privilege, that *longing for salvation* will always expand itself in habitual *delight in the law*: which in its turn will enlarge the desire for the full enjoyment of *salvation*. All spiritual desire therefore, that is not practical in its exercise, is impulse—excitement—not—as in this man of God—the religion of the heart—holiness, "*delight*."

Would that this beautiful Psalm might quicken us to be followers of him, who evidently knew so much of the heavenly joys of religion! Why should we not, why do we not, determine to know as much of God as we can? Why are our "*longings for his salvation*" so transient and so few? The religion of thousands who bear the name is of a very different stamp—empty instead of solid—withering instead of profitable—insipid instead of delightful. If there be any exercise, it is only "the door turning upon hinges"¹—movement without progress—their heads stored with knowledge, but no unction in the heart—"ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."²

But the soul that really *longs* shall "not be ashamed of its hope." Even to taste the present fruits—though it be but a taste—in a sense of reconciliation, liberty of access, a beam of the love of Jesus in the heart, is unutterable enjoyment. It strengthens the soul for endurance of trials, and for a devoted, self-denying, obedient service. But there are heights and depths of Divine love yet unexplored.³ He who has vouchsafed large apprehensions of them to others, "is rich in mercy to *all that call upon him*."⁴ The fountain of everlasting love is ever flowing, ever full; and he who commands us to "open our mouths wide," has promised, "I will fill them."⁵ After all, however, the grand consummation is the object to which these *longings for salvation* stretch with full expansion. The fulness⁶ and likeness of God⁷—the complete and everlasting deliverance from sin⁸—the glorious "manifestation of the sons of God"⁹—the coming of the Lord.¹⁰ Then—not till then—will they be fully and eternally satisfied. Praised be God! "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."¹¹

Lord of all power and might! create in our souls a more intense "*longing for thy salvation*," and a more fervent "*delight in thy law*." And as our "*longings for thy salvation*" increase, oh! nail us to the doorposts of thy house, that we may be thy happy servants forever!

¹ Prov. xxvi. 14.

² Tim. iii. 7.

³ Eph. iii. 18, 19.

⁴ Rom. x. 12.

⁵ Psalm lxxxix. 10.

⁶ Eph. iii. 19.

⁷ Psa. xviii. 15. Phil. iii. 20, 21.

⁸ Rom. viii. 23. 2 Cor. v. 1—8.

⁹ Rom. viii. 19—21.

¹⁰ Rev. xxii. 23.

¹¹ Rom. xiii. 11. "This salvation has been the objects of the hopes, the desires, and *longing* expectation of the faithful, from Adam to this hour; and will continue so to be, until he, who hath already visited us in great humility, shall come again in glorious majesty, to complete our redemption, and take us to himself."—Bishop Horne. Compare also Scott *in loco*.

175. *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee: and let thy judgments help me.*

THERE must be life in order to praise; for how can the dead speak? Yet is it as natural for the *living* soul to *praise*, as for the living man to speak. And is not *the life* that the Psalmist is now praying for, the *salvation* for which he was *longing*? The taste that he has received makes him hunger for a higher and continued enjoyment; not for any selfish gratification, but that he might employ himself in *the praise of his God*. Indeed, the close of this Psalm exhibits that pervading character of praise, which has been generally remarked in the concluding Psalms of this sacred book.¹ Yet he alone is fitted for this heavenly exercise, of whom it has been said—"This my son was dead, and is alive again."² And how will he, who has "looked to the hole of the pit whence he was digged,"³ who has been awakened to a sight of that tremendous gulf, from which he is but "scarcely saved,"⁴ long to give utterance to the effusions of a praising heart! How will he cry for the quickening influence of "the Lord and Giver of life," to stir him up to this delightful privilege! Praise springs from prayer—"Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee." When the breathing of "*life into our souls*," enlivens our services, we become, in the noblest sense, "living souls."⁵

Too often, however, the consciousness of inconsistency, carelessness, and unspirituality, damps our song. But let every recollection of our sin be accompanied with an humble yet assured confidence in the Lord's pardoning grace. The abominations of a desperately wicked and unsearchably deceitful heart may well lead us to "abhor ourselves in dust and ashes."⁶ Yet in the lowest depths of abasement, the Saviour's blood, applied to the conscience, "cleanseth from all sin."⁷ He who once "passed by us, and saw us polluted in our blood, and said unto us, when we were in our blood, Live;"⁸ still "holdeth our souls in life"⁹—covering our daily infirmities, and maintaining our everlasting acceptance before God.

But while the song of *praise* dwells on our lips for life thus freely given, let us guard against all hinderance to its growth and influence. For if the life within waxes low, praise will be dull and heartless; but when the assured believer cries with acceptance—"Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee"—see how his spirit kindles with holy fire—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!"¹⁰ The work of praise is now his nature, his

¹ Verses 164, 171, 172. The last six Psalms are for the most part throughout the breathings of praise. They were probably written at the close of life, and may be considered as striking indications of a soul ripening for glory. As the perfumes of Arabia Felix are said to exhale their odors in the neighboring provinces; so it is no marvel if, as "the sweet Psalmist of Israel" drew near to the happy country, he should have inhaled its atmosphere of praise.

² Luke xv. 24.

³ Isaiah li. 1.

⁴ 1 Peter iv. 18.

⁵ Gen. ii. 7.

⁶ Job xlii. 6.

⁷ 1 John i. 7.

⁸ Ezek. xvi. 6.

⁹ Psalm lxxvi. 9.

¹⁰ 1 Peter i. 3.

'It is sufficient for me'—said Luther—triumphing in the very heat of

element, his delight. No wonder, then, that he continues his cry for the daily renewal of his spiritual life, that he may return to this sweet antepast of heaven—"Let my soul live." And, indeed, this life—the more it is known, the more will it form the constant matter for prayer. For what besides makes existence tolerable to a child of God? The mere actings of a sickly pulsation can never satisfy him. Considering how much nearer he might live to God than he has yet known, he longs for more vigorous influence of the Divine principle. In his most active enjoyments, his insufficiency for this sacred work presses upon him, and stirs up petition for help—"Let thy judgments help me." Give me such an enlightened apprehension of thy word—of thy character—of thy perfections as the God of my salvation, as may furnish abundant matter for unceasing praise; so that my daily exercise may be, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹

176. *I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.*

THE native disposition to wander from the fold is constant ground for prayer for the *help of the Lord's judgments*—to give us clearer light and preserving principles. Yet our need of this safeguard opens to us a most humbling truth. Who can gainsay the testimony from the mouth of God—that "all *we like sheep have gone astray?*"² But how afflicting is the thought, that this should not only be the description of a world living without God, but the confession even of God's own people! And yet where is the child of God, that does not set his own seal with shame to the confession—*I have gone astray like a lost sheep?* "Who can understand his errors?" If he be not found—like Peter—in the open path of wandering—yet has he not need to cry, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults?"³ Is he never led away by sense, fancy, or appetite? If the will be sincere, how far is it from being perfect! And only a little yielding—bending to the flesh—giving way to evil—who knoweth what may be the end of this crooked path? Who knoweth what pride—waywardness—earthliness may be working within, even while the gracious Lord is strengthening, guiding, comforting his poor *straying sheep?* That they should ever wander from privileges so great—from a God so good—from a Shepherd so kind! What can induce them to turn their backs upon their best Friend, and sin against the most precious love that was ever known, but something, that must, upon reflection, fill them with shame! The blame is readily cast upon the temptation of Satan, the seductive witcheries of the world, or some untoward circumstances. But whoever deals honestly with himself must trace the backsliding to

conflict—that I have a precious Redeemer—a powerful High Priest—my Lord Jesus Christ. I will praise him as long as I have breath. If another will not join me in praising with me, what is that to me?—D'Aubigne's History of the Reformation, Book iv. ch. i.

¹ Ephesians v. 20.

² Isa. liii. 6.

³ Psa. xix. 12.

his own heart—"This is *my* infirmity."¹ And have we replaced what we have wilfully yielded up, with anything of equal or superior value? May it not be asked of us—"What fruit have ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed; for the end of those things is death?"²

But there is no enjoyment, while distant from the beloved fold. It is as impossible for the child of God to be happy, when separated from his God, as if he were in the regions of eternal despair. He has not lost—he cannot wholly lose—his recollection of the forsaken blessing. In struggling weeping faith, he cries—"Seek thy servant." 'I cannot find my way back;'³ the good Shepherd must seek me. Once I knew the path; but now that I have wandered into bye-paths, I am no more able to return, than I was to come at first. I have no guide but the Shepherd whom I have left.' How cheering then in his office character!—"Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out: as a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the dark and cloudy day."⁴ Cannot I set my seal to his faithful discharge of his office—"He restoreth my soul?"⁵

If I want further encouragement to guide my steps homeward, let me think of his own description of his tender faithfulness, and compassionate yearnings over his lost sheep; not showing it the way back to the fold, and leaving it to come after him; but "laying it upon his own shoulders, and bringing it home;" all upbraidings forgotten; all recollections of his own pains swallowed up in the joy, that he hath "found the sheep which was lost."⁶ Let me remember the express commission, that brought the Shepherd from heaven to earth—from the throne of God to the manger, and thence to the garden and cross, "to seek and to save that which was lost."⁷ Let me see upon him the special mark of "the good shepherd giving his life for the sheep."⁸ Let me observe this sacrifice as covering the guilt of my wanderings, and opening my way to return—yea drawing me in the way⁹—surely I may add to my contrite confession the prayer of confidence—*seek thy servant*. I cannot forbear to plead, that though a rebellious prodigal, I am still "*thy servant*," thy child: I still bear the child's mark of an interest in thy covenant. Though a wanderer from the fold, "*I do not forget thy commandments*." Nothing can erase thy law, which was "written in my mind and inward parts"¹⁰ by the finger and Spirit of God, as an earnest of my adoption—as the pledge of my restoration. What man writes is easily blotted out: what God writes is indelible. Let me then lie humbled and self-abased. But let me

¹ Psa. lxxvii. 10.

² Rom. vi. 21.

³ 'Domini, errare potui; redire non potui'—was Augustine's true and humbling confession.

⁴ Ezek. xxxiv. 11, 12.

⁵ Psalm xxiii. 3

⁶ Luke xv. 4—6.

⁷ Ib. xix. 10.

⁸ John x. 11.

⁹ Isaiah liii. 5, 6.

¹⁰ Jer. xxxi. 33.

not forget my claim—what has been done for me. Thus again I hope to be received as a “dear” and “pleasant child;”¹ again to be clothed with “the best robe,” to be welcomed with fresh tokens of my Father’s everlasting love,² and to be assured with the precious promise—“My sheep shall never perish, and none shall pluck them out of my hand.”³

Such, Christian reader, would be the application we should make of this verse to ourselves; and such a penitent confession of our backslidings, united with a believing dependence on the long-trying grace and faithfulness of our God, would form a suitable conclusion to our meditations on this most interesting Psalm. We would unite the publican’s prayer with the great Apostle’s confidence; and while in holy brokenness of heart we would wish to live and die, smiting upon our breast, and saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner:”⁴ the remembrance of our adoption warrants the expression of assurance, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.”⁵ Yet, as it regards the experience of David, is there not something striking, and we had almost said, unexpected, in the conclusion of this Psalm? To hear one—who has throughout been expressing such holy and joyful aspirations for the salvation of his God, such fervent praises of his love, that we seem to shrink back from the comparison with him, as if considering him almost on the verge of heaven—to hear this “man after God’s own heart,” sinking himself to the lowest dust, under the sense of the evil of his heart, and his perpetual tendency to wander from his God, is indeed a most instructive lesson. It marks the believer’s conflict sustained to the end—the humility, and yet the strength of his confidence—the highest notes of praise combining with the deepest expressions of abasement—forming that harmony of acceptable service, which ascends “like pillars of smoke”⁶ before God. And thus will our Christian progress be checkered, until we reach the regions of un-mixed praise, where we shall no more mourn over our wanderings, no longer feel any inclination to err from our Shepherd’s presence, no more experience the wretchedness of distance from him, or the difficulty of returning to him—where we shall be eternally safe in the heavenly fold, to “go no more out.”⁷ FOR “HE THAT SITTETH ON THE THRONE SHALL DWELL AMONG THEM; THEY SHALL HUNGER NO MORE, NEITHER THIRST ANY MORE; NEITHER SHALL THE SUN LIGHT ON THEM, NOR ANY HEAT; FOR THE LAMB WHICH IS IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE SHALL FEED THEM, AND SHALL LEAD THEM UNTO LIVING FOUNTAINS OF WATERS; AND GOD SHALL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS FROM THEIR EYES.”⁸

¹ Jer. v. 20.

² 1 Peter 24, 25. Luke xv. 22, 23.

³ John x. 28.

⁴ Luke xviii. 13.

⁵ 2 Tim. i. 12.

⁶ Cant. iii. 6.

⁷ Rev. iii. 12.

⁸ Rev. vii. 15—17.

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P R E F A C E.

THE Writer did not enjoy the privilege of personal acquaintance with the subject of this Memoir. But when the materials, both of incident and manuscript, were placed in his hands, he could not but feel that many subjects of valuable interest and importance might be brought out with advantage to the church. He has been constrained to compensate for the paucity of incident by the introduction of large extracts from her writings and correspondence, which, however, will be often found to afford instructive developments of the character of her mind, and the principles of her profession. If he should be thought, by the extension of his own remarks, to have occasionally transgressed the bounds of a biographer, he can only cast himself upon the indulgence of his reader, in the exercise of his important responsibility, in availing himself of this opportunity to offer a few suggestions of Christian love upon subjects of present and most anxious interest in the church of God.

Such as his work is, the Writer desires to commend it to the blessing of the great Head of the Church, trusting that the example of the highly-gifted and consecrated character here set forth, may reflect the glory of His adorable name, and quicken the energies of those who bear that name upon their profession, to aspire to a more elevated standard of Christian devotedness and privilege.

*Old Newton Vicarage, }
July 16, 1832. }*

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

SECOND EDITION.

THE interest that has been excited by the following Memoir, has induced the Writer, after having exhausted the materials with which he had been previously furnished, to investigate fresh sources of information, by which he might bring forth the proper individualities of Miss Graham's character, and the circumstantials of her life into more distinct and detailed exhibition. This object he has been enabled to accomplish, by a selection from her own letters, as well as from communications readily furnished by her family and friends. He has added also a few of such extracts from her manuscript, as were likely to be generally acceptable, and prefixed a portrait, taken about four years before her death, which it was thought would increase the interest of the work. He now once more commits it to God and his church, with the desire that it may reflect—not the honor of the creature—but the glory of the Saviour.

Old Newton Vicarage, }
March 9, 1833. }

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MEMOIR

OF

MISS MARY JANE GRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

HER EARLY LIFE.

“THE works of the Lord are great; *sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.*”¹ Elevated indeed is the Christian’s pleasure² in “seeking out the great works” of creation. But it is the work of “redemption,” which mainly attracts his delighted contemplation³—as the mirror in which the glory of his God and Saviour is most fully unveiled before him. The “new creation”⁴ on the heart of man is one grand division of this perfect work of God: and often does its display of “the beauty of holiness” constrain the world to a reluctant acknowledgment, and excite the church to joyful adoration—“What hath God wrought!”⁵ For not only will the Redeemer’s glory be manifested in his saints at the blissful era of his coming⁶—not only will they then be seen “as the jewels”⁷ of his everlasting crown; but even now are they “the glory of his inheritance”—set forth for the conviction of the world—“that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and that the Holy one of Israel hath created it.”⁸

It is the object of the following sketch to bring forth to view one of these striking manifestations of divine power and grace, and to illustrate, in connection with this memorial, some of those edifying and instructive lessons which it will be seen to present before us.

MARY JANE GRAHAM was born in London, April 11, 1803. Her father was engaged in a respectable business, from which he retired a few years before his daughter’s death (and chiefly from regard to her delicate health,) to the village of Stoke Fleming, near Dartmouth, Devon. She appears to have been the subject of early religious

¹ Psalm cxi. 2. Compare Bishop Horne’s beautiful note.

² Ps. xix. 1. Compare Rom. 1. 20.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 6; v. 17. Eph. ii. 10.

⁴ 2 Thess. i. 10.

⁷ Mal. iii. 17.

³ 1b. cxi. 2, with 3, 5, 9.

⁵ Numbers xxiii. 23.

⁸ Eph. i. 18. Isa. xli. 19, 20.

convictions. At the age of seven she had acquired those habits of secret prayer, which may be considered a favorable mark of divine influence upon her soul. But we will give the history of this era of her life in her own words. To a friend who had evinced some incredulity of the genuineness or permanency of early impressions of religion, she thus writes :

March, 20, 1827.

‘You appear, my dear friend, to think very early piety too wonderful a thing to be true. It is wonderful—so wonderful, that, when David was contemplating the starry firmament, he was drawn for a moment from his meditation on the wonders he there beheld, by the still greater wonder of “God’s ordaining strength out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.”¹ But David’s wonder and yours were of a very different nature—he wondered and adored. Jesus, too, that “man of sorrows” once “rejoiced in spirit,” because God “had hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.”² ‘Even so, Lord Jesus; in thy rejoicing will I too rejoice; let the world think me a fool or an enthusiast, or beside myself, as they thought thee.’ The story of ‘Little Henry and his Bearer,’ to which I believe you allude, I have been assured by Miss——, is every word of it true. Do not then bring upon yourself the dreadful sin of limiting the power of the Holy One of Israel. Jesus has said, “Suffer little children to come;”³ and they will come, if he calls them. As facts are the strongest of all proofs, bear with me a little longer, while I tell you briefly the history of a child, for the truth of which I can vouch. I knew a little girl, about sixteen years and a half ago. She was much like other children, as full of sin and vanity as ever she could hold: and her parents had not as yet taken much pains to talk to her about religion. So she went on in the way of her own evil heart, and thought herself a very good little girl, because she said her prayers every night and morning, and was not more passionate, wilful, and perverse, than most of her young companions. The God of love did not think this sinful child too young to learn of Jesus. He so ordered it about the time I am speaking of, when she was just seven years old, that she was led by a pious servant into some alms-houses belonging to Rowland Hill, who had just been preaching in them. The servant and an aged woman entered into a long conversation together, to which the little girl listened, and wondered what could make them like to talk about such things. But at the close of it, the old woman took the child affectionately by the hand, and said to her—‘My dear child, make the Lord Jesus your friend now that you are so young: and when you come to be as old as I am, He’ll never leave you nor forsake you. God the Spirit sent these simple words to the

¹ Psalm viii. 1—4.

² Luke x. 21. This, though not the direct, is an inclusive meaning of the declaration.

³ Mark x. 14.

poor sinful child's heart. She walked home in silence by her nurse's side, thinking how she could get Jesus to be her friend. Then she remembered how often she had slighted this dear Saviour; how she had read of him in the Bible, and been wearied of the subject: how she had heard the minister preach about Jesus, and wished the long dry sermon over; how she had said prayers to Him without minding what she said; how she had passed days, weeks, and months, without thinking of him; how she had loved her play, her books, and her toys, and her play-fellows—all, all better than Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit convinced her of sin. She saw that no one good thing dwelt in her, and that she deserved to be cast away from God forever. Would Jesus love her now? Would he ever forgive her? She feared not; but she would try. She would make herself very good, and then, perhaps, Jesus, would be her friend. But the more this little girl tried to be good, the more her naughty heart got the better of her; for she was trying in her own strength. She was led to give up trying in that way; and many long nights did she spend in praying "with strong crying and tears" to Jesus that he would teach her how to get her sins pardoned, and make her fit to have Him for her friend. Let me mention it for the encouragement of those who seek Jesus, that He did not disdain to listen to the prayers of this little child. He put it into her heart to read the Bible, of which, though she understood not all, yet she gathered enough to give her some comfort. One day her attention was fixed on these words—"The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."¹ Now something that could take away sin was just what this little girl wanted: and she asked her father to tell her who this Lamb of God was. He explained to her this precious verse. But who can describe the raptures which filled the bosom of this little child, when made to comprehend that the "blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin." Now she fled to Jesus indeed. Now she knew that He had loved her, and given himself for her; now the Spirit of God, who often "chooseth the weak and foolish things of the world, to confound the wise and mighty,"² "shed abroad the love of God in the heart"³ of a weak and foolish child, and "filled her with peace and joy in believing."⁴ She had no one whom she could talk to of these things. But she held sweet converse with her reconciled God and Father: and gladly would she have quitted this life to go and dwell with Jesus. Since then she has spent nearly seventeen years of mingled happiness and pain. But she has had Jesus for her friend; and He never has, and never will forsake her.⁵ She has forsaken Him more than once for a season, and turned to follow the vain things of the world. But her Shepherd's eye has been over her in her wanderings, and He has never suffered her *quite* to depart from Him. To this day, her vain and treacherous heart is continually leading her to provoke her heavenly friend. "He visits her transgressions with the rod,

¹ John i. 29.² 1 Cor. i. 27.³ Rom. v. 5.⁴ 1b. xv. 13.⁵ Heb. xiii. 5.

and her iniquity with stripes;" but he has sworn never to "take his loving kindness from her, nor to suffer his faithfulness to fail."¹ She is constrained to acknowledge, that during all this time she has never done one thing that could merit God's favor. Free grace, free mercy, are all her song; "It is of the Lord's mercy she has not long ago been consumed."² She is quite sure she could never have changed her own heart. No; God has begun the good work in her, and he must carry it on; and from first to last, let glory be ascribed to Him, and let her take the shame and confusion to herself. At this moment she desires to live, if she may be made the means of converting one sinner to Jesus; but if not, she would rather "depart and be with Christ, which is far better." She is far from despising earthly blessings. Every morsel she puts into her mouth, the very air she breathes, is made sweet and refreshing by the loving hand that sends it. Once there was a curse on all her earthly blessings. But now "Christ hath redeemed her from the curse of the law, being made a curse for her."³ She would give it as her living experience, and leave it when she goes hence as her dying testimony, that there is nothing worth living for except to know Him, and see others come to Him, and wash their guilty souls in the blood of the Lamb. God has given her the blessing of seeing a happy change take place in some of the dear companions of her childhood and youth. She waits upon him for the salvation of the rest; and there is no one, whom she longs after more ardently in the Lord, than that dear and valued friend of her earliest days, to whom this letter is addressed; and to whom she wishes every spiritual blessing, that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost can bestow, now and for evermore: Amen and Amen.'

Some apparent discrepancy may be observed between this exquisitely beautiful and natural letter and her published account of this important crisis.⁴ Perhaps some readers may suspect the letter to be somewhat tinged with the spirit of her subsequent experience. Though, however, the apprehensions of Divine truth which it expresses, were indeed clear and enlivening, far beyond the average of spiritual capacity of children; yet her 'view of many of the doctrines of Christianity,' which she afterwards so fully developed and so richly enjoyed, was at this time 'very indistinct.'⁵ Doubtless also much of natural feeling and excitement was mingled with these early impressions of religion; while what was of a spiritual character, as she afterwards discovered, was not sufficiently grounded upon that sense of universal guilt and helplessness which prostrates the sinner at the foot of the cross, simply dependent upon a free salvation.⁶ This superficial cast of impression—*without invalidating the reality of a Divine change*—will account for the instability which marked her early course in the ways

¹ Psalm lxxxix. 32, 33.

² Lam. iii. 22.

³ Gal. iii. 13.

⁴ Test of Truth. By Mary Jane Graham. (Seeleys.)

⁵ Test of Truth.

⁶ Test of Truth.

of God. From her own history we learn that she 'was enabled to walk with God in sincerity, and without any considerable declension during the greater part of her childhood, and the commencement of a riper age.'¹ After this period, however, 'more than once,' as her letter informs us, she 'forsook' her heavenly Friend, 'turned to follow the vain things of the world,' and "went on frowardly in the way of her own heart"—"leaning to her own understanding," and led captive in her own folly.

Of this period future notice will be given. Meanwhile we revert to her early years as spent under the roof of her parents or at school. Her parents considered her virtues as those of *every day*—that is, habitual—and not merely called forth on particular occasions. She was a most amiable, affectionate, and dutiful child, seldom needing correction, tender-hearted when told of her faults, and by her general kindness of disposition attaching all the members of the household to herself. She was remarkably free from selfishness; always ready to yield to her companions, even to deprive herself of what she valued. Her little pocket-money was generally reserved for some object of distress, or for some token of affection to a friend.

Her quickness of mind was a subject of early observation. Her reading was chiefly obtained by attending to the lessons which were given to her brother, then preparing for school. She was seldom seen without a book in her hand, and seemed never so happy as when employing herself in the improvement of her mind. Yet this thoughtful cast of character was by no means tinged with unnatural gloom. In all the harmless games of childhood none of her companions excelled her in playful activity;² while in the midst of her cheerful temperament, it was abundantly evident that the main concern of religion was uppermost in her mind. 'I recollect,'—her cousin writes,—'that when we were quite little children, she made some attempt to talk to me about religion—once especially, when we were sitting behind the curtain in the drawing room at ——. I did not like the subject, and therefore walked away, and joined my more worldly-minded companions.'

Her school career commenced soon after she was seven years old. She was however shortly removed, from ill health, and again, about the age of ten, sent to a school of a different kind. Many of her companions, who survive her, will probably long preserve the remembrance of that peculiar kindness and gentleness of spirit, which combined with her superior powers. One of them remarks her great carefulness to screen, as far as it was lawful to do so, the faults of her fellows, and her anxiety to plead for them when in disgrace: and so powerful was her advocacy, that her preceptress was constrained to remove out of her way, when her judgment compelled her to persevere in her discipline. In all the school difficulties, she was the constant resource, ever ready and willing to assist, without

¹ Test of Truth.

² One of her early friends however remarks, that her games and manner of amusing partook more of imagination and of genius than those of the generality of children.

any assumption upon the ground of her acknowledged superiority. One trait of peculiar loveliness was here exhibited, (the spirit of which was marked on various occasions in after-life,) in her consideration of any of her companions, who, from any unfavorable causes, might appear to be neglected. These were the objects of her particular notice, and with them she shared all her little indulgences.

Her religious impressions appear to have been cherished by the familiar exhortations of the husband of her preceptress, and by devotional exercises with those of her companions, who were living under the practical influence of their Christian instruction. To one of them she proposed to learn every day a portion of Scripture in private, and to repeat it to each other when they retired to rest. At this time she committed to memory the whole of the Prophecy of Isaiah, besides other portions of the sacred volume.

At the age of twelve her delicate health again occasioned her removal from school. Her illness lasted for about two months, during which time, when confined upon the sofa, she committed to memory the whole Book of Psalms. Indeed her powers of memory were of an extraordinary order. She was much delighted with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and had learnt the greater part, if not the whole, of that magnificent poem. For many successive mornings she repeated to her father most correctly upwards of three hundred lines each morning. Upon her recovery from illness she passed several months with a careful servant by the sea-side. So instinctive were her habits of active usefulness, that she employed herself, though only in her thirteenth year, in collecting a few children for the purpose of instruction, and in distributing tracts. In returning home to her parents, she enjoyed with them the rich and responsible privilege of the ministry of the late Rev. Samuel Crowther, Vicar of Christ Church, Newgate Street—an eminent “watchman of Ephraim,” now with his God.¹ Under his faithful and affectionate instruction she was brought to the ordinance of Confirmation about the age of sixteen, and publicly “joined herself to the Lord in a perpetual covenant never to be forgotten.”²

These interesting notices of Miss Graham's early life may suggest a few profitable remarks.

Let Christian parents be excited to an immediate and persevering discharge of their anxious responsibilities. Early impressions are of the highest moment in reference to the future course of their children. Let them be prayed for, expected, cherished. They cannot be too early or too urgent in presenting (after the example of the believing parents of old) the petition of the angel of the covenant—“How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?”³ They can scarcely fix the precious seed too soon into the fresh soil. The pure simplicity of the rudiments of the Gospel is specially suited to the dawn of infant intelligence; and

¹ Hosea ix. 8.

² Jeremiah i. 5.

³ Judges xiii. 12, with 18.

well would it be, if our children should never be able to recur in after life to the time, when these vital truths were first presented to their minds. The child's intellect opens faster than is commonly considered. The first impressions often retain a firm and permanent grasp through life. And abundantly has the experience of the Church testified—that early piety is eminent piety.¹

It may appear suspicious, that so little shade is discoverable upon the records of Miss Graham's childhood. But defects cannot be noticed, where they were not observed. Probably our own sphere of observation, if not our immediate circle, may be furnished with similar cases, sufficient to preclude an unwarranted incredulity. And indeed these instances often afford the most striking illustrations of the total depravity of the fall. For while Miss Graham was in the estimation of her parents all that their fond hearts could wish—what was she in the sight of God? Self-knowledge under Divine teaching soon discovered to her, that under this attractive garb was hid the mighty principle of alienation of heart from God. There was no natural preparation for heavenly influence. It was only a more lovely appearance of the death that reigned within. Her subsequent expressions therefore of self-abhorrence were not the ebullitions of a false humility, or of misguided fanaticism, but the genuine conviction of the Spirit of God upon her heart.

The subject of our history suggests also the importance of an early excitement of the principles of active usefulness. No doubt Miss Graham's habits of early activity had an important influence in maturing her character for the high privilege of devoting herself to the interests of her fellow-creatures. It was Cotton Mather's practice to endeavor to enlarge the minds of his children, by engaging them daily in some 'Essay to do good.' He encouraged and commended them, when he saw them take pleasure in it, and never failed to show them that a backwardness would subject them to his displeasure.² This example cannot be too strongly inculcated. To present to children an object beyond themselves, would tend much to counteract the natural principle of selfishness, so baneful to their personal happiness, and to their intellectual, moral, and spiritual improvement. At the same time, to give this habit its full effectiveness, it is necessary, that these 'Essays to do good,' should be acted out under the influence of self-denial, in the relinquishment of their own indulgences, for the benefit of the objects of their kind consideration.

¹ 'Barker's Parent's Monitor' gives a useful digest of information well calculated to guide the instructor, and to encourage the diligence and patient perseverance of parental faith. The principles of Christian Education are brought out with much simplicity and practical detail in the valuable and well-known works of Mrs. Hoare and Mr. Babington, which cannot be too highly recommended. Perhaps the most full and interesting illustration of these principles will be found in the Biographies of the Henry family, (Lives of P. and M. Henry, and Mrs. Savage and Hulston,) by Mr. Williams, of Shrewsbury, and a valuable volume recently published—'Domestic Portraiture'—containing the records of several of the late Rev. Legh Richmond's children.

² See Cotton Mather's Life, abridged by Mr. Jennings. It is published also, Vol. I. of an admirable series of Christian Biography, by the Religious Tract Society.

CHAPTER II.

HER RELAPSE INTO INFIDELITY.

ABOUT the age of seventeen, Miss Graham's mind underwent a most extraordinary revolution. She fell, for a few months, from the heavenly atmosphere of communion with God, into the dark and dreary regions of infidelity. Allusion has already been made to this afflicting circumstance, in her letter.¹ But for a most interesting and graphic detail, the reader must be referred to her own published account;² some digest of which will here be given, in order to connect the thread of her history, and to exhibit a clear view of one of the most important eras in her life.

Miss Graham's mind at this time began to open in a metaphysical form—unfavorable to a simple reception of truth. And this, connected with a defective apprehension of her lost state, induced a spirit of self-dependence—one of the most subtle and successful hindrances to the Christian life.³ Thus was the way opened to a secret habit of backsliding from God. The foolish vanities of the world for a while captivated her heart; and her manners were remarked to be like those of other thoughtless girls of her own age. From frivolity she sought refuge in her more solid intellectual pursuits. All sources of self-gratification within her power were resorted to with the fruitless attempt of obtaining peace in a course of departure from God. Wearied at length with disappointment, this prodigal child “began to be in want;” and many a wishful eye did she cast towards the rich provision of her Father's forsaken house.⁴ In turning, however, to religion for comfort, she found, to use her own words—“Alas! I had no religion: I had refused to give glory to the Lord my God; now my feet were left to stumble upon the dark mountains.”⁵

The doctrine of the Divinity of Christ had often been to her, (as

¹ *She had forsaken him more than once,* evidently includes a reference to this history. In the recollection however of her complete restoration, she added—“He has never suffered her quite (i. e. altogether and finally) to depart from Him.”

² Test of Truth.

³ She alludes to an injury which her own mind, in common (as she conceives) with many others, had received from adopting Doddridge's form of covenanting with God. (See his Rise and Progress, Chapter xvii.) This was in her thirteenth year. Let it however be remembered, that, though this mode of dedication may have frequently ministered to a legal spirit, yet it by no means necessarily partakes of an evangelical character. This “subscribing of the hand unto the Lord,” has been found by many eminent Christians, (as, for example, Philip Henry's family,) to be a cord of love, not a yoke of bondage. A touching and expressive record of this character, from the pen and heart of the Rev. R. Hall, is given by Dr. Gregory. Allusion is probably made to it as an acceptable ordinance in the service of the Gospel. Isaiah xlv. 3—5.

⁴ Luke xv. 14, 17.

⁵ Test of Truth.

to many other minds cast into the same mould) an occasion of perplexity. Now it was "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence." Though repeated examination had fully satisfied her that it was *the truth of the Bible*; yet so repulsive was it to her proud heart, that she was led from thence to *question the truth of the Bible itself*. 'I suspected'—said she—'that a system of religion which involved such apparent absurdities, could not possibly come from God. Determining to sift the matter to the utmost, I eagerly acquainted myself with the arguments for and against Christianity. *My understanding was convinced that the Scriptures were Divine. But my heart refused to receive the conviction. The more my reason was compelled to assent to their truth, the more I secretly disliked the doctrines of the Bible.*'¹

Continued resistance to convictions was the natural and melancholy result of this inquiry. She determined to lay the subject aside for a while, still 'persuading herself that there must be flaws in the evidence of so strange a history,' which only her want of maturity of judgment, prevented her from discovering. Those early religious impressions, that usually form a bulwark against infidelity, in her case proved a stumbling-block to her faith. Ignorant of the native bias of her heart against the Gospel, she considered them as the effect of prejudice, before her mind had been intelligently informed or exercised. She now, therefore, determined to burst her chains, and to think and examine for herself.

Hitherto she had confined her perplexities within her own bosom; partly dreading the influence of external bias, and partly fearing to infuse into another's mind doubts concerning a book, which, she could not conceal from herself, might after all be true. She endeavored now to strengthen her mind by pursuing a course of intellectual study, with the direct design of preserving herself from becoming a dupe to "cunningly-devised fables." And here she did not fail subsequently to acknowledge the special forbearance and wisdom of her Heavenly Father. Justly might He have deprived her of that reason, which she had so presumptuously set up in his own place. Yet was he pleased to overrule this waywardness of his child, as an ultimate means of her restoration, in applying her course of mental discipline to the effectual discovery of the fallacies with which she was now deluded.

The immediate effect however of these studies was decidedly injurious. Their absorbing interest diverted her mind from the main subject of inquiry; while they proved also a temporary refuge against the uneasy disturbance of her conscience. Even her intervals of reflection were too easily soothed by the indefinite postponement of the great concern to "a more convenient season." Occasional convictions were indeed felt, but without any permanent or practical influence.

Through the Divine mercy, this state of infatuation did not prove

¹ Test of Truth.

of long duration. After a few months' captivity, she was brought, though not without severe conflict of mind, to the full light and liberty of scriptural truth.¹ The conviction of the being of a God, in her darkest moments had never wholly forsaken her. A few hours' contemplation of the starry heavens darted into her mind a piercing reflection upon her stupidity and ingratitude, in what she justly called an 'unnatural and parricidal attempt to banish God from his own creation, to depose him from his natural supremacy over her heart.'² Her whole life now appeared to her (what indeed the Scriptures declare it to be), one continued act of sin and folly. Her convictions, however, of sin—being wholly unconnected with any discovery of the way of forgiveness—naturally tended to despondency. Every fresh sense of the corruption of her heart, and of the unsullied purity of the Divine character, brought with it a corresponding sense of guilt. She could expect, therefore, nothing but punishment proportioned to the infinite sinfulness of her offence. She could not conceive the consistency of her forgiveness with the claims of Divine justice; and the alternative of her eternal punishment seemed even less dreadful than the supposition of any inconsistency in Him, who, in her view, was the perfection of holiness. 'I had acquired'—she remarked—'such a perception of the beauty of holiness, that the thought of an unholy God was worse than hell to me. I felt that I had rather God should pour on me all the vials of his wrath, than that, carried away by an unworthy softness and weakness, he should forgive, and thereby encourage sin. *To undergo eternal punishment was horrible. To acknowledge an unholy God was more horrible.*'³

As her last expedient, her despised Bible was brought to mind. And 'how different'—she observes—'was the temper of mind, in which I now addressed myself to its perusal, from that in which I had read it in the commencement of my disbelief of Christianity! I was no longer a proud sophist, triumphing in the strength and penetration of human reason, and in the comprehensiveness of human knowledge. The contemplation of my own ignorance, weakness, and wickedness, had laid my pride in the dust. My eyes were opened to view myself as I really was—depraved and blinded in my reason, judgment, and understanding. *And this is the process,* she adds, *which must take place in the soul of every man, before he can pursue the search after truth in a right spirit.*'⁴

Her interest was early directed to the promises of Divine teaching to the sincere inquirer after truth. Their suitableness fixed her attention. Their freeness encouraged her heart. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find. He giveth his Holy

¹ It may be remarked, that severe providential afflictions about this period concurred with the exercises of her own mind, to awaken her mind to this self-abasing recollection of her fearful departure from God.

² Test of Truth, p. 75. Compare Romans i. 20, 21, 28.

³ 1b.

⁴ Test of Truth.

Spirit to them that ask Him"—especially arrested her.¹ She determined to make trial of them, conceiving that their fulfilment in her own case would be a '*Test of the Truth*' of the book, which held them forth for her acceptance. Though hindered at first by a sense of unworthiness, she ventured to apply: justly considering that whatever might be her apprehensions of her own demerit, yet a state of submission and desire could not be so displeasing to God, as one of carelessness and rebellion.² But the description of this anxious crisis must be given in her own striking words. 'Impelled by these reflections—fearful and uncertain, but with uncontrollable, unutterable longings, I directed my applications '*To the unknown God.*' O my Redeemer! the first breathings of my soul were not uttered in thy name! I rushed into the presence of my Judge without a mediator. But doubtless even then Thy comeliness was thrown over the deformity of my soul; and the eye of my Father beheld me with pity, for thy dear name's sake. My prayer ascended up to heaven, fragrant with the incense of thy merits; though the poor wretch who offered it thought to please God by leaving thee out of it.'³

In this prostration of soul, she continued "watching daily at her Lord's gates, waiting at the posts of his doors." It need scarcely be added—she did not seek in vain.⁴ The Divine character now appeared before her—not—as before—in its consuming holiness; but in the combined glory of holiness and love. Her apprehensions of sin, of Christ, and of the whole system of Christian truth, were now irradiated with heavenly light; and with "simplicity and godly sincerity" of "heart," she was enabled to "believe unto righteousness." The character of Christ, as a proof of the credibility of the Christian revelation, arrested her particular attention. A minute scrutiny of His spotless life was most satisfactory in its result.⁵ 'The more,' said she, 'I studied this Divine character, the more I grew up as it were into its simplicity and holiness, the more my understanding was enabled to shake off those slavish and sinful prejudices, which had hindered me from appreciating its excellence. Truly his words were dearer to me "than my necessary food"—He was my "All in all." I did not want to have any knowledge, goodness, or strength, independently of him. I had rather be "accepted in the Beloved," than received (had that been

¹ Luke xi. 9—13. The drawing out of this argument forms the first part of the '*Test of Truth*'—upon which a venerable clergyman remarks—"I hope I have been for many years a suitor for this promise. But I never before felt myself so intelligently encouraged and animated to persist in my humble petition for more and more of Divine knowledge." See also these promises, and the whole subject of '*The Test of Truth*,' powerfully illustrated in the Bishop of Calcutta's Lectures on the Evidences of Christianity—Lecture xix.

² *Test of Truth*.

³ *Ibid.* p. 87. It may be asked—"Where was all that knowledge and faith expressed at her first reception of the Gospel?" (See her letter, p. 3—6.) But in fact, her infidelity was a black cloud—intercepting all present apprehensions of faith and intelligence. There are eminent Christians in the Church, who have "entered into this cloud," and whose recollections are more or less familiar with this agonizing but triumphant conflict.

⁴ See Proverbs viii. 31, 35. Isaiah lxiv. 5; xlv. 19. ⁵ *Test of Truth*.

possible) on the score of my own merits. I had rather walk, leaning upon his arm, than have a stock of strength given me to perform my journey alone. To learn, as a fool, of Christ; this was better to me than to have the knowledge of an angel to find out things for myself.'

After her recovery from this fearful snare of Satan, she was mercifully preserved from "turning again to folly," and led forth in "the path of the just,"² with increasing light, strength, and establishment. 'From that moment'—she adds—'I ceased to stumble at the doctrines of the cross. The doctrines of Scripture, which had before appeared to me an inexplicable mass of confusion and contradiction, were now written on my understanding with the clearness of a sunbeam. Above all, that once abhorred doctrine of the Divinity of Christ was become exceeding precious to me. The external evidences of Christianity, though I now perceived all their force, were no longer necessary to my conviction. From that time'—she concludes—'I have continued to "sit at the feet of Jesus and to hear his word;" taking him for my Teacher and Guide in things temporal as well as spiritual. He has found in me a disciple so slow of comprehension, so prone to forget his lessons, and to act in opposition to his commands, that, were he not infinitely "meek and lowly in heart," he would long ago have cast me off in anger. But he still continues to bear with me, and to give me "line upon line, and precept upon precept." And I am certain that he "will never leave me, nor forsake me;" for, though I am variable and inconstant, "with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."³

The writer cannot but hope, that at this awful crisis, when a moral pestilence (far more dreadful than the late cholera visitation) is stalking through the land, the preceding narrative may suggest seasonable caution, conviction, and encouragement to some, especially of his young readers. Let them mark the connection of the first principles of infidelity, *with the exercise of the understanding and with the state of the heart.*

¹ This is not a solitary instance of impression from the contemplation of the character of Christ. Even Mr. Chubb must have felt some conviction, when he describes his life 'as a beautiful picture of human nature in its native purity and simplicity; and showing at once what excellent creatures men would be, when under the influence and power of that Gospel which he preached unto them.' (True Gospel, p. 56.) Rousseau's exquisite contrast between Socrates and Christ is well known, concluding with the remarkable acknowledgment respecting the latter—'The inventor of such a personage would be a more astonishing character than the hero.' Yet could this man's heart resist the clear conviction of his judgment—'I cannot'—he subjoins—'believe the Gospel.' His Confessions, however, clearly trace his unbelief to its proper cause—the *love of sin*. See John iii. 19. 20, a text which throws more light upon the secret springs of infidelity, than whole volumes that have been written upon the subject.

² Psalm lxxxv. 8. Prov. iv. 18.

³ Test of Truth, pp. 112—117. The extracts given from this interesting little work, will be sufficient to commend it to the reader's attention, as the production of an author of no common power, and deeply imbued with the glowing principles of the Gospel. It will remind the reader of some of Mr. Scott's painful exercises of mind described in his 'Force of Truth;' and of the argument so successfully handled by Bishop Burnet in his disputations with Lord Rochester.

Pride of intellect in Miss Graham's case, was evidently one main cause of her departure from God. When her mind left the stronghold of faith, her scriptural light, which could only be apprehended through spiritual optics, became obscured, until she was gradually left to the Egyptian darkness of her own understanding. And this we apprehend to be a very usual commencement of an infidel course, upon principles equally opposed to reason and to revelation. Man, in his prurient desire to pass the bounds of revelation, forgets that while "the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children," the "secret things" are no less the property of God.¹ As he has, therefore, reserved them for himself, this "intrusion into the things which we have not seen," and cannot see, is the unhallowed indulgence of a "fleshy mind."² The extent and precise boundaries of revelation are determined by infinite wisdom; and could we discern them with a single eye, they would be found equally illustrative of a high regard to the happiness of man. A more expanded view under present circumstances would only increase instead of clearing up our difficulties. The eye would wander over the field of infinite space with a disproportioned power of perception. The objects, therefore, would be less distinctly apprehended; and the result would leave us more restless and dissatisfied, while the happy influence of humility, simplicity, and faith had been wholly disregarded. If we have not the whole view before us, let it suffice that we have all that is needful for our happiness and present duty. The attempt to supply what we conceive to be wanting, by the conjectural effort of reason, would be to subject "vain man" to his Maker's merited rebuke—"Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?"³ Every step of advance beyond the divine record is fraught with danger and uncertainty. "In God's light" alone "can we see light."⁴ The intellectual "light that is in us," when applied by the pride of man to the contents of revelation—"is darkness; and how great is that darkness!"⁵ Simple faith, therefore, however mistaken or despised, may justly be deemed the highest act of reason; while rational religion, 'falsely so called,' may easily be proved to be of all schemes the most irrational.⁶

¹ Deut. xxix. 29.² Col. ii. 18.³ Job. xxxviii. 2.⁴ Psalm xxxvi. 9.⁵ Matt. vi. 23, with 1 Cor. ii. 14.

⁶ The writer cannot forbear to add some admirable remarks from an unpublished manuscript of Miss Graham's, shortly to be noticed. 'It is true that faith compels our assent to many things beyond the reach of reason, even of the renewed reason. But this implicit credence is itself the highest and noblest exercise of the understanding. It is a reasonable assent to the testimony of One, in whom we repose unlimited confidence, because we have reasonable grounds for concluding him to be infinitely wiser than ourselves. An exercise of the reason is pre-supposed, whereby we are assured that the Bible is God's testimony; and an act of the understanding, whereby, having obtained this assurance, we infer, that every word of the Bible must be true. The divine philosophy of faith, then, sets out upon these two propositions. The first an assurance, founded in reason, that the Bible is the revelation of God. The second an inference, equally founded in reason, that every word of the Bible is true; and must therefore be taken in preference to all the deductions of our own reason, which *may or may not be true*. Neither of these propositions is shaken by the fact, that the Bible contains many things which we do not

• We would add a few words upon *the connection of infidelity with the state of the heart*. We are not exclusively intellectual beings. The affections so materially influence the judgment, as often to incapacitate it for the accurate discernment of truth. The natural bias of the heart is to sin, and *consequently to infidelity*, the excuse and covering for sin. The point at issue is, whether men shall remain the servants of sin, or become the servants of God—whether they shall be degraded as sensual beings, or raised to the elevation of intelligent or spiritual existence. Now, as the Gospel stands in the way of natural indulgence, it must be removed. So that if a course of infidel reading or intercourse with scoffers, has not furnished the necessary arguments, they must be invented from the man's own heart. The danger of infidelity is not, therefore, confined to the ungodly and profane. Every unconverted man must secretly wish the Bible to be untrue; and under this bias he will (except restrained by an Almighty power) endeavor to prove it untrue. A wrong state of heart, as with Miss Graham, gives the power and advantage to this active and malignant principle. In her early state of child-like simplicity she would have been safe. But the "fulfilment of the desires of the mind," probably more than of "the flesh,"¹ combined with ignorance of "Satan's devices," brought her into his snare; and she was "taken captive by him at his will."² Depending upon the teaching of the Spirit of God, our "path" in divine knowledge will be "as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."³ And 'whenever' (as an original and powerful writer remarks) he opens the Scriptures, that same light that discovers the meaning, will not fail to affect and make our hearts burn within us with the sense of divine light, authority, and power. Of this the experience of the people of God, as they grow in knowledge, furnishes them daily with new instances; and therefore they do not stumble at the want of the present sense of that light, but are quickened to diligence, excited to frequent cries for opening of their eyes, that they may understand the wonders, that by the knowledge of other parts of the world, they are induced to believe couched in those parts, which yet they know not.⁴

understand; or in other words, that God may know many things that we do not know; that many things may appear to His infinitely holy and unclouded understanding, in a very different light from that, in which they are viewed by our narrow and prejudiced minds. When the first proposition is once proved to the entire satisfaction of the mind, the second must follow of course. Then faith, an implicit, child-like faith, becomes the only *rational* mode of proceeding. Every departure from this faith is a departure from reason; an insult to the understanding; a violation of common sense. And that we do make such departures, only tends to prove that, while the renewed understanding "consents to the law of God that it is holy, just, and good," "the law of sin," which is yet working "in our members," occasionally beclouds and perverts it.

¹ Eph. ii. 3.

² 2 Tim. ii. 26.

³ Prov. iv. 18.

⁴ Halyburton's Essay on the Nature of Faith. To the same purport Mr. Baxter writes: 'I think that in the hearing and reading (of the Bible) God's Spirit often so concurreth, as that the will itself should be touched with an internal gust and savor of the goodness contained in the doctrine, and at the same time the understanding with an internal irradiation, which breeds such a certain apprehension of the verity of it, as nature

One further remark suggested from this interesting record may serve to prevent unnecessary distress and misconception. Let not Miss Graham's vivid portraiture of her own feelings and views be considered as a general standard, as if the same intensity of mental exercise, and clearness of spiritual perception, were the exclusive evidences of a sound conversion of heart to God. Self-renunciation, diligent investigation of divine truth, and a conscientious improvement of the light vouchsafed, are indeed indispensable marks of Christian sincerity. Yet while the enjoyment of our high privileges will vary in proportion to the energy of these holy principles, *the measure of their influence* is almost indefinitely diversified within the precincts of the true church of God. It may also be important to observe, that many of Miss Graham's most painful trials (such as her intellectual pride) arose out of the peculiar form of her natural character. No sympathy, therefore, can be expected, or need be desired, in minds cast in a different mould; and any effort to excite or encourage it, for the purpose of establishing an ideal connection with this object of attraction, (which would probably be unaccompanied with a desire to imitate the spiritual excellences of the proposed model) can only originate in deceit, and tend to self-delusion.

gives men of natural principles. And I am persuaded that this, increased by more experience and love, doth hold Christians faster to Christ than naked reasonings could do. And were it not for this, unlearned ignorant persons were still in danger of apostasy by every subtle caviller that assaults them. And I believe that all true Christians have this kind of internal knowledge, from a suitableness of the truth and goodness of the Gospel to their now quickened, illuminated and sanctified souls.' More Reasons for the Christian Religion, in reply to Lord Herbert, and supplemental to his great work in defence of Christianity, (12 mo. 1672. pp. 135, 136.)

CHAPTER III.

GENERAL SKETCH OF MISS GRAHAM'S LIFE—HER VIEWS OF STUDY—EXTENSIVE ATTAINMENTS AND ACTIVE DEVOTEDNESS TO GOD.

MISS GRAHAM continued to reside in London for some time after her deliverance from that awful delusion, into which she had been permitted to fall. The remembrance, however, of this temporary apostacy was "ever before her"¹ with all that holy shame and self-abasement, which attaches to the "purified conscience of the pardoned sinner"²—humbling her in the dust, while yet faith, hope, love, peace, and joy, were the dominant principles in her soul. Deeply also did she feel the constraint of the command given by anticipation to a backsliding apostle—" *When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren.*"³ It was the great object of her 'Test of Truth,' to set forth her own case as a beacon of warning, an example of encouragement, and a monument of divine grace, for the special use of those who may be brought into the same seductive atmosphere of temptation. There is reason to believe, that her work in its original form produced its measure of conviction upon her principal correspondent; and we may confidently expect, that in a wider circulation, an answer to her prayers for a Divine blessing upon it will be abundantly manifested. During her residence in London, the ministry of the Rev. Watts Wilkinson, and a deep study of the sacred volume, were the ordained means of advancing her knowledge and experience of Scriptural truth. Her intellectual habits were a source of much gratification to her; and mainly contributed, under the blessing of God, to form her character into a mould of solid and permanent usefulness. It is, however, delightful to observe her Christian simplicity and watchfulness, to subordinate these valuable enjoyments to the primary object of the glory of God. Of this the following prayer, found among her papers, will furnish an interesting and edifying illustration.

'Before study of any kind, remember that it is but lost labor except the Lord bless it.

SUMMARY OF THINGS TO BE SOUGHT OF GOD BEFORE STUDY.

'I desire to thank thee, my God and Father in Christ Jesus, for this and every other opportunity of improvement Thou hast given me. May the opportunity Thou hast given me be blest of Thee!

¹ Psalm li. 3.

² Ezekiel xvi. 63.

³ Luke xxii. 32.

Enable me to receive it with thanksgiving, and sanctify it to me by the word of God and prayer. Oh let me know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified; and other things *just so far* as may be for my good and Thy glory, *and no further*. I would mourn before Thee the base ingratitude with which I have hitherto abused my time and talents, by loving thy gifts more than Thee, and seeking myself, not Thee, in them. Now I bring all my things to Thee; for they are *not mine. but thine own*. Take that *accursed thing self out of them all*, and condescend to use them for thy glory. I thank Thee that the meanest employment is acceptable in Thy sight, when done in the name of the Lord Jesus. May I set about this, in *His name, and in His strength, and to His glory!* May I not *once seek my own things in it, but the things that are Jesus Christ's!* Let me no longer lean to my own understanding; but may I so acknowledge Thee in all my ways, that Thou mayest establish my thoughts, and direct my paths! Suffer me not to be wise in my own conceit, nor vainly puffed up in my fleshly mind. Make me to cease from mine own wisdom. Be Thou my wisdom.

‘Holy Lord God the Spirit! who dividest unto every man severally as thou wilt, *bless such of my studies, and in such a degree* as may be most to thy glory. If it be thy will, prepare me by them for the work, to which I desire thou wouldest call and separate me.¹ I commit this work to which I would devote myself, into Thy hands. Prosper it or not as Thou seest good. Thy will be done respecting it; only take *all self-seeking out of it*; get Thyself glory, Lord, in all that I do, and keep me from ever wishing to rob Thee of Thy glory. Lord, if Thou wilt bless me abundantly, grant that in whatever Thou givest me, I may remember I have received it, and not glory as if I had not received it. I set myself to this employment in the name of Jesus: may I have fellowship with Him in it! Let it not become a snare to me; but may the Lord, who is my confidence, preserve my foot from being taken in this net, which has so often entangled me!

‘O Thou glorifier of Jesus! take of the things that are His, and show them unto me, and unto all Thy people, with such light and power, that our wills, desires, and affections may be quite swallowed up in His love. Let us have no will but Thy most holy will. Convince us that all things else are mere dross and dung, in comparison with *that* most excellent knowledge of our dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which do thou give us every day more abundantly, making us to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Even so, Holy Spirit, for the sake of Thy great mercies in Christ Jesus, to whom, with Thee and the Father, be all the honor, all the praise, and all the glory, now and for ever. Amen.’

¹ This was a plan which lay very near her heart, for the gratuitous instruction of the children of Missionaries, and of Christians in reduced circumstances, with a view to qualify them for the situation of teachers.

In the same spirit, an extract from a letter to a young friend engaged in the work of tuition, gives the following sensible advice, with a modest reference to her own case.

March 22, 1827.

'You ask me whether I think study is wrong. I think, on the contrary, if we study with a view to the glory of God, it becomes a duty to do so. If we study merely to please ourselves, I think *it is wrong*. Your situation seems to render study necessary; and when we reflect how few of those who are engaged in teaching, are truly pious, it ought to stir us up to the best improvement of our time and talents. The love of study and mental amusements has been my great snare, and has so very often led me astray, that I have been tempted to give it up altogether. I feel thankful to God that whenever I have begun to make some progress in my favorite study, He has thwarted my attempt to excel by some seasonable interruption, a fit of illness or some domestic trial. But when I think, how very useful a moderate degree of mental cultivation may make me, and particularly that it seems the way of usefulness most suitable to me, if I should recover my strength,¹ I mean to resume it as soon as I can; and I hope in Christ, through whose goodness every opportunity of improvement is given, that he will not suffer these opportunities to become hindrances to my advancement in the knowledge of him. Let us pray to be taught to feel, that all earthly knowledge is mere dross and dung, in comparison with the most excellent knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and then I trust we may pursue, without abusing it, only taking care never to neglect any present duty, or any spiritual duty for it.'

But we will here give some large extracts from an unpublished Treatise 'On the Intellectual, Moral, and Religious uses of Mathematical Science,' as conveying her full and matured sentiments upon this important subject.²

¹ See note p. 323.

² We subjoin an analysis of this Manuscript, which will give some view of the extent, general accuracy, and spiritual character of Miss Graham's mind. Introduction. CHAPTER I. The Usefulness of Mathematics in learning to reason—Groundwork of Mathematical Sciences. Art of stating a Question—Modes of Demonstration—Analysis—Connection—Art of Simplifying Processes—Intermediate principles. CHAPTER II. The Beneficial Influence of Mathematics upon some parts of the Intellectual and Moral Character—Attention—Abstraction—Penetrativeness and Invention—Arrangement—Moral Habits of Mind. CHAPTER III. The Disadvantages of Mathematical Studies—Engrossing attention of the Pursuit—Contempt or Mistrust of other Evidence—Effect on the Imaginative Faculties. CHAPTER IV. The advantage of Mathematical Science, and of the Cultivation of Reason in general, considered in a religious point of view. CHAPTER V. A review of the Disadvantages and Temptations to which the religious Student is exposed. In the Introduction she specifies the persons for whom she primarily wrote,—'those who, in the ardor of their pursuit after human learning, are not unmindful of its immeasurable inferiority to "the wisdom which is from above."' 'To them'—she remarks—'study of every kind presents considerations of higher import than even the intellectual benefits that are reaped from it. The introduction of religion into secular matters is too often censured as impertinent and unseasonable; and many will think it wholly out of place in a work confessedly on science. I can only reply'—she adds—'by the simple confession, that I should grieve to be acquainted with that science, which might not, under God, forward in some way or other the grand object of my existence.'

Speaking of study generally, she marks with accurate discrimination, the different principles of the worldly and the Christian student.

‘Many and varied are the motives by which the worldly student is actuated. But his views all centre in some way or other in his own person. Self-gratification, self-advancement, self-interest, are mingled with them all. The Christian student is also variously influenced. But he has learned to transfer all his actions to another centre. The glory of his reconciled God is the point on which they all turn, the compass by which they are all directed. The outward conduct of the two characters may present many points of similarity. Their inward intentions are totally and irreconcilably different. The intrinsic excellence of science, its ennobling influence upon the mind, the delights that are to be enjoyed in the pursuit of it, and the benefits that are to be reaped in its attainment;—these are objects common to the man of the world, and to the religious man. But mark wherein the difference consists. With the former they are primary objects of consideration; the latter beholds them only in a secondary point of view. The Christian student is far from despising the advantages of study. He has felt what it is to thirst after knowledge, and he possesses a keen relish for the pleasures of intellect. But he puts all these considerations away from him till he has answered a question of higher importance. His first inquiry is—‘How shall I study for God? How shall I render my acquirements subservient to his glory?’ If he cannot answer the question to his complete satisfaction, the uneasy recurrence of it will prove a continual drawback to the spirited and successful prosecution of his studies.’

Upon a very prevalent misconception upon this subject she gives the following just remarks:—

‘It has been too much the practice with a well-meaning but injudicious portion of the religious world, to decry human learning, as if it were a thing absolutely unchristian and pernicious. They attack it in the gross, and apply to it all that the Scripture has said concerning “the wisdom of this world.” They appear to forget, that these censures apply not to the use, but to the abuse, of human learning. Those who “lean to their own understandings,” who are “wise in their own conceits,” who set human wisdom in the place of the Holy Ghost’s teaching—these are the wise and learned, of whom the Scripture affirms, that the things of the kingdom are hid from their eyes.¹ But the description was never meant for the

“Thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them, when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” (Deut. vi. 7.) These are the commands of God concerning the momentous truths of Scripture. They leave us very little time for science, *independent of religion*. Every believer in the Bible will endeavor to act in the spirit of these words. He will consider that time as lost, which is spent without regard to eternity; and that learning as useless, which he cannot employ in subservience to heavenly knowledge.² This valuable manuscript was written about two years before her death. She had intended, during her last illness, to have revised it for publication. But increasing weakness, and the overwhelming impressions of the near prospect of eternity, compelled her to relinquish her design.

¹ Matt. xi. 25.

discouragement of those, who pursue human study in a simple, child-like dependence upon God. It sometimes happens, that the young convert, full of religious zeal, and possessed with some vague and ill-defined notion of the worthless and ensnaring nature of human learning, is led by a mistaken sense of duty either entirely to abandon it, or greatly to slacken his efforts in the attainment of it, and so to shut himself out from a wide field of future usefulness.

Upon the lawfulness of study she draws the line with great precision and Christian simplicity.

‘Does the time’—she asks—‘you now devote to study, break in upon any known and immediate call of duty? If it does, your way is clearly pointed out. *No prospect of future good can justify you in the neglect of present duty.* Your studies must, according to circumstances, be wholly abandoned, or laid aside, till you can resume them without feeling that conscience is drawing you another way. Perhaps you are ready to exclaim, that “this is a hard saying.” You cannot contentedly resign or postpone your hopes of mental improvement. Still less can you consent to hazard the loss of all that you have already acquired. Suffer me to remind you of two points of view, in which it imports you to consider this question.

‘I readily admit, that the studies of worldly men may be successful, notwithstanding the evil spirit in which they are prosecuted. “They have their reward.” But nothing that you do can prosper, without the divine blessing. This must be the crown of your undertakings, or you labor in vain. If you know anything of the spirit of prayer, you make it your constant request, that all your doings may prosper, as far as they will promote the glory of God, and no further. In answer, then, to your own petition, God must withhold his blessing from your most laudable employments, if they do not lie in the direct path of duty. On this account you have no rational prospect of success. If you do succeed, be assured that some root of bitterness will spring up from the very accomplishment of your purposes. To continue your studies, therefore, under existing circumstances, would be to subject yourself to certain vexation and disappointment.

‘On the other hand, I would remind you, that if you simply attend to your duty, and resolutely forego the most beloved pursuits the moment they come into competition with it, there is no fear that you should lose anything by such conduct. He who made and who preserves your intellectual faculties, can surely enable them to retain anything that will be really useful to you. Your small stock of knowledge will, with his blessing, carry you further than the acquisition of the whole circle of human science could do without it. We may affirm of intellectual gains, no less than of those which are gross and tangible, that “a little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked.”¹ We are commanded to “be careful for nothing, but in everything to make our

¹ Psalm xxxvii. 16.

requests known unto God.”¹ You may therefore in faith commit your studies and acquirements to Him. You may freely ask, and confidently expect, that he will take care of them for you, and return them to you, whenever they shall be wanted for his service.’

The lawfulness of study being proved, its expediency, importance, and responsibility are next considered.

‘But perhaps the contrary to all this is your case. You feel that you can devote a certain portion of your time to study, without infringing upon any prior and more imperious demand of duty. If it be thus with you, your studies are *undoubtedly lawful*. It only remains to inquire, how far they may be *expedient* for you.

‘Of this, you must yourself be the best judge. It must depend on a variety of circumstances—the particular bent of your talent; the opportunities of improvement which lie within your reach; your present situation, or your future prospects of life. Let us suppose that all or any of these combine in such a degree, as to give you reason to hope that your studies may open a door of usefulness. I shall endeavor to convince you, that no fancied dread of the snares and temptations attendant upon human learning ought to deter you from the pursuit of it. In your case the acquisition of knowledge is not merely a permitted employment, but a positive duty. God has made nothing in vain. He has given us nothing, which we may not use to his glory. This we admit without reluctance in reference to every minor blessing, with which his bounty has enriched us. We acknowledge, that our health, time, riches, influence, are all intrusted to us for God’s service, and capable of being used to his glory. But do not they make a strange exception to this general admission, who so roundly assert the utter inefficiency of human reasoning, and of human learning? If so many things, which we possess in common with unbelievers, may yet be legitimately improved to the glory of God, why is the understanding to be excepted? Why must that best and fairest of God’s common gifts be suffered to lie waste, only because it is a common one? None can deprecate more earnestly than I do the idea, that the unassisted light of human reason can ever make us wise unto salvation. But shall we therefore say, that the reason takes no part whatever in our reception of truth? Remember that he who gives you spiritual teaching is the very same who gave you this human understanding. He gave you not the former to supersede and overpower, but to guide and enlighten, the latter. Both are alike his gifts; and though the one is inferior to the other, and useless without its aid, yet we must neither neglect nor despise him. *Nothing that he gives can be worthless*. So much for reason itself. And as for those parts of human learning, which contribute to strengthen and improve this faculty, *they are also given by God*; means which he has adapted to the fulfilment of no ignoble purpose. We are just as much bound to use those instru-

¹ Phil. iv. 6.

ments, which Providence has placed within our reach for the cultivation of our understandings, as we are bound to attend to the culture of our fields. Nay, unless we deny that our minds are better things than our fields, we are more called upon to *encourage* the growth of the former than of the latter. If God has given you superior faculties, and the means of improving them, there cannot be a more manifest token, that he intends they should be improved. The parable of the talents is never more fairly exemplified, than when, in the way of duty, we go and trade with the natural abilities which our Divine Master has distributed to us, till we can bring them back to him with the grateful acknowledgment—"Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds."¹

'If, then, you are possessed of superior powers of mind, remember, that the source from whence they emanate is divine. Esteem the gift very highly for the Giver's sake; and seek to bring it to that perfection, of which he has made it susceptible. Use your talents, as not abusing them. Keep them in the dependent, subordinate station which they are intended to occupy. Expect not from them more than they are capable of performing. But expect something from them. Do something with them. Cannot you find any use for them? Take them to God. He has large fields for their employment. There is ample room in his vineyard. Pray that he would send you forth to labor in some way or other in that plenteous harvest, whose laborers are so few. There is nothing so sweet, as this simple committal of your way to one, who is infinitely able to guide and protect you in it. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."² Then they become paths of usefulness indeed. The most brilliant fancy, the profoundest judgment, the clearest understanding, the most extensive learning, are *in themselves* less than nothing. But entreat the blessing of God upon them; and you shall find they will be worth just so much as he pleases. The infidel exerts the whole force of his understanding, blinded as it is by the god of this world, in opposing the doctrine of the cross. Let yours, illumined by a beam from the fountain of light, be no less unequivocally devoted to the service of the cross. Think not the time lost that you spend in study, if you are studying in and for God. Do not say—"I will lay aside the vanity of human learning, and trust only to the divine teaching for powers of sound argument and appropriate expression." You might with equal justice say—"I will abandon the superfluous toil of ploughing my lands, and confide in Providence for a plentiful crop." It is true in both these cases, that the increase cometh from God only; but it is no less true, that he will have the planting and the watering to be ours. God will not help you, if you refuse to help yourself. The trust of the slothful is an impious and a foolhardy trust. His mind, like his vineyard, shall be grown over with weeds.

¹ Luke xix. 12—16.

² Proverbs iii. 6.

‘In intellectual, as well as in spiritual gifts, “the Spirit divideth unto every man severally as he will.” Thus we read that “Bezaleel was filled with the Spirit of God, in all manner of workmanship, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and the embroiderer.”¹ And if these meaner talents come directly from him, how much more the nobler properties of the understanding! Are you indebted to his bounty for the possession of a piercing and commanding intellect, and strong powers of reason? I am sure he did not give them to you for nothing. Why fold that napkin round them? It is your Lord’s treasure. What possible right have you to “bury it in the earth?” Do what you will with your own, if indeed you can find anything which is your own. But beware how you trifle with what is his. He is coming, and will expect to “receive it with usury.”²

‘Consider—had those powers of mind belonged to you as the bondman of Satan, how would you have toiled to perfect them for his service! How much mischief would you have contrived to do with them! And shall “the Lord’s freeman” take no pains to improve his talents in his Redeemer’s cause? Shall no good be done with them, now that they are Christ’s? It is in truth a strange doctrine, that they must lie dormant, because Satan has no longer any claim upon their exertion.

‘Why is it, that we have such a dread of calling in the aid of our reasoning powers? Is it not because we look upon reason as something of our own? If we reason in faith, is it not the Spirit of our Father speaking within us, just as much as in any other mode of addressing the unconverted? If we employ human means only so far as we have the warrant of Scripture, of past experience and of present providences; if we cultivate our faculties in the humblest and simplest dependence upon God; surely this is neither making flesh our arm, nor “leaning to our own understanding.”³

Some difficulties connected with study are then discussed in interesting connection with Christian principles.

‘I cannot but attribute many of the difficulties which perplex and obstruct the Christian student, to his not studying sufficiently in faith. We do not pursue our intellectual contemplations in the same simple, child-like dependence, which we are sometimes enabled to carry into our other duties. We make study an employment too entirely secular. We are apt to consider it as something wholly apart from religion. It is one of those subjects, upon which we do not permit ourselves to converse freely with our heavenly Father. To apply to him at every step for counsel and assistance, would convey to us an idea of presumption. We are afraid to trifle with the majesty of God, by expecting that he will take an interest in the mere earthly improvement of the intellect. That he both gave us this intellect, and bestowed on us the means of its cultivation, is admitted by us beyond the possibility of a doubt. We

¹ Exodus xxxv. 30—35.

² Matthew xx. 27. Luke xix. 20—23.

³ Proverbs iii. 5.

adore the bounty which has adorned and enriched us. But we hesitate to believe in a condescension which shall stoop to notice the petty progress of each minute portion of this intellect, and make its daily and hourly advancement the object of benevolent concern. I would not, my beloved fellow Christians, utter one single expression which might impair your veneration for the Divine Majesty. But in this timid reserve I perceive no marks of genuine veneration. Your privilege is to draw near to God, with the tender reverence, the sacred familiarity of a beloved child. To shrink from his presence with the retiring fearfulness of a slave, is to dishonor the scripture representation of his attributes. And in which of your earthly affairs can you hope that the benevolence of your Father will be interested, if not in the cultivation of your reason? It is the gift by which he has distinguished you from the rest of his earthly creation. It is that which stamps you with the impress of Divinity, which tells you, you are born to immortality. The immensity of condescension by which the Most High bends his regard to any of our paltry concerns, is indeed beyond conception, as it is beyond praise. But if, where all is so unworthy, I might dare to mention one thing as less unworthy of his notice, it would be the progress of the mind. We "are fearfully and wonderfully made." But our intellectual faculties are the surpassing wonder, the crowning excellence of God's creation. The countless worlds that are scattered over the infinity of space, declare the glory of God. The magnificence which created, the strength which upholds, the wisdom which governs the mighty system, afford inexhaustible matter of wonder and adoration. But the intellect, which is able to reflect upon all this, is something far more admirable, in which the glory of God is more greatly conspicuous. The original formation of reason is not, however, more wonderful, than the improvement of which it is capable. A man of a highly cultivated understanding appears altogether a being of a different order from one wholly destitute of the advantages of education. Reason, as it is the noblest of our faculties, so it is the most capable of being conducted to a high degree of perfection. And God is glorified in the perfection of his works. When therefore you cannot confidently look for communion with God in the exercises of your understanding; when you are afraid to expect his co-operation in the use of the meanest of those human aids which he has given you for its improvement, it can only be accounted for in two ways. This hesitation proceeds either from the absence of a religious motive, or from an infirmity of faith. If you have no decidedly religious motives for your studies, I do not see how, with any color of propriety, you can devote yourself to them at all. I am not surprised to hear that doubts and difficulties throng your path. But if you are seeking to cultivate your understanding with a single eye to God's glory, you may so conduct each one of your literary employments as to

enjoy his presence all the time you are engaged in it. You may draw near to God even in your studious hours. He will not despise anything that you do for him. His love accepts your worthless services with as much complacency as the princely obedience of an angel. I repeat it; to study in faith, *in a humble, simple, child-like faith*, removes every perplexity and temptation incident to its pursuit. Your employments will then cease to appear altogether secular. Cultivating your reason as God's gift, and assured that he beholds not with indifference your feeble attempts to glorify him in this greatest wonder of his creative power; its commonest exercises will become in a measure sacred as the exercises of religion. Spiritual improvement, with no lingering step, will accompany your intellectual progress. "Holiness to the Lord" will be written upon the most trivial of your studies.¹

The influence of a vain-glorious spirit, as the canker upon this holy principle of faith, is pointedly illustrated.

'When once the thought of what men will say of us is permitted to mingle with our studies, all spiritual comfort in them is at an end. Our faith must necessarily languish. It can no longer be a living faith—an active principle. "How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another?" was the severe rebuke of Jesus to the vain-glorious Pharisees.¹ When I observe a Christian delighted with the homage that is paid to his eloquence, his judgment, or his taste—should he tell me, that his "love is not waxing cold"—that his faith is as strong as when none but God cared for his obscure name, I should be beyond measure astonished at such a circumstance, if, indeed, I could credit its reality. But in truth, the assertion only proves that the man's heart must be already "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;" or that he has never known what true faith is; for "how can he believe," so long as he is "receiving honor from men?"²

The snare of self-indulgence connected with study, is most profitably treated.

'I have all along supposed, that you are studying with a view to the benefit of others, rather than to your own gratification. Yet even in this case self-indulgence may insinuate itself into your pursuits. If you possess a talent for them, they will prove so attractive to you, that you will become attached to them for their own sake. You will be tempted to prolong your pleasing employments, and suffer them gradually to steal something from the time appointed for other duties. We have already touched upon the absorbing nature of our mathematical studies, and the intellectual disadvantages, which ensue from giving way to their silent encroachments.

¹ John v. 44.

² To one of her correspondents she expresses her own perplexity about continuing her studies on account of the snares which she had found in them. 'I reflect that study has been to me like the stuff of Achan, beneath which was concealed the cursed thing. I know that my cursed thing is self-love, and seeking my own will, honor, pleasure, and wisdom—and not those of Jesus.' See also her letter, March 23, 1827, p. 26.

These, however, are of small moment, when compared with their corroding influence upon our spiritual enjoyment. An excessive fondness for these abstruse meditations, a habit of indulging in them for their own sake, will be as a worm at the root of our communion with God. A lamentable declension from his ways, will be the probable consequence. By insensible degrees the thoughts of our literary pursuits will begin to mingle with our serious meditations. Then, the hour of study will break in upon the hour of prayer, and perhaps in time may totally interrupt or supersede it. Who can tell the train of evils, which will follow such an intermission of our spiritual watchfulness? When prayer is omitted, study is un sanctified. Every selfish motive has free permission to enter; nay, is invited, as it were, to take possession of the heart, whose sentinel has thus deserted his post. And with what impertinent excuses do we entertain conscience all the time! 'I am just now so occupied, that I am scarcely in frame for prayer. Were I to attempt it, I should find it impossible to disengage my thoughts from the busy, perplexing reflections, which have taken fast hold of them. When I have followed out these investigations to some satisfactory conclusion;—when I have considered this or that point a little more fully; when I have conquered this difficulty, or corrected that mistake;—then my mind will be in a placid, uninterrupted frame. Then shall be my hour of prayer. I shall then betake myself to my spiritual duties with tranquillity and delight; whereas, now they would be a weariness, a formality.' Thus the hour of prayer is put off, to "a more convenient season." Our contemplations detain us longer than we had anticipated. The evening shades thicken round us; still we are deeply engaged in our inquiry; still unsatisfied with the result. Midnight surprises us at our labors; and at last the lateness of the hour warns us to repose, before we have found time to pray. A sense of languor and drowsiness—the natural result of our intense mental exertions—either quite prevents our devotions, or compels us to insult God with a prayer from which the heart is absent. We retire to rest with the painful feeling that we have lost a day. For every Christian must be sensible, that he cannot rob God of his portion of the day, without robbing himself of the whole. Still the deceitfulness of sin will follow us with a lying consolation. 'It is but one day; to-morrow I shall awake, refreshed, and my first thoughts shall be with God.' Let us not silence conscience with this deceitful plea. If I am not greatly mistaken, this one lost day is the forerunner of many more. Our foot has begun to slide, our steps to decline. 'To a heart prone to depart from God, this retrograde motion is natural and easy, while the effort to regain a forward progress is immensely difficult. The sin to which we have yielded to-day, will revisit us to-morrow with more urgent solicitations. Self, having obtained the indulgence of one day, will plead hard for another. 'To make no more than one deviation from the straight path, is infinitely more difficult than not to deviate from it at all. "The backslider in heart shall be

filled with his own ways."¹ Perhaps the very circumstance of having a religious motive for study, may then be used by us as a cloak to hide our defection. 'All my pursuits are designed to fit me for engaging in God's service. I cannot therefore go very much out of the way of duty, by devoting to them a little more time than prudence might otherwise have dictated. My present diligence will one day be turned to account in the cause of religion; it cannot, therefore, be wholly misplaced.' Thus, in the plenitude of self-indulgence, we can talk to ourselves about our zeal for the Lord of Hosts. Our conduct resembles that of the priests, who "offered polluted bread upon the altar, and then said, 'Wherein have we polluted thee!'"² If we would offer any acceptable service to God, it must not be thus defiled with self. "Hath the Lord as great delight in" our worthiest pursuits, "as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" We are told that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."³ Our poor worthless attempts in the cause of our Redeemer can be of no value, but as they are accepted by God through his intercession. How foolish then to imagine that we can succeed, while we neglect thus offering them to God in frequent and faithful prayers! If we will work in our own strength, we must expect to be left to such success as our own strength is able to insure.

'Do you, upon serious reflection, perceive, that you are now yielding in any way to this self-indulgent temper? Let me earnestly recommend a temporary cessation, if possible, from the employments that have ensnared you. A month, a week, in some cases even a day, rescued from your too fondly cherished occupations, and devoted to earnest prayer for future preservation and direction, may enable you to resume them without danger. But, as you value your peace and spirituality of mind, beware of returning to them, till you experience so much sweetness in heavenly things, as to make the very best of earthly things appear trifling and insipid in the comparison. The memory of Henry Martyn is sacred to every Christian student. The rule by which he regulated his literary pursuits, deserves to be called the golden rule of study. Let us carry it into all the parts of human learning. It will strip them of every excessive and ensnaring attraction. 'So deep'—says his biographer—'was his veneration for the word of God, that when a suspicion arose in his mind, that any other book he might be studying was about to gain an undue influence over his mind, *he instantly laid it aside; nor would he resume it, till he had felt and realized the paramount excellence of the Divine oracles.*'

She adverts to what she had said above,⁴ as suggesting a safeguard against some temptations of self-sufficiency and self-dependence.

'The only effectual remedy I have met with, is, to consider human reason and spiritual teaching in one respect exactly in the

¹ Prov. xiv. 14.² Malach ii. 7.³ 1 Sam. xv. 22.⁴ Pages 27, 28.

same point of view: I mean, as both freely bestowed by God, to be increased, continued, or suspended at his pleasure. I would consider every little improvement in my studies; the smallest extension of my intellectual powers; the least ray of light that shines in upon my natural reason, when engaged in the commonest earthly speculations;—all these I would consider as coming just as directly and absolutely from the Spirit of my God, as I do those sacred influences which inform and comfort my spiritual existence. Ceasing to look upon reason as our own, we should cease to lean upon it with a misplaced confidence. What we expect from it would be expected from the God to whom it belongs, not from ourselves, who have no right in it. The only way to preclude all glorying and trusting in our own things, is, *to have nothing of our own*. Then, *when all is God's*, we can neither confide too much, nor expect too largely. Thus David acted. He said—"I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me." Did he therefore resign the use of the sword and of the bow? No: but he ascribed the strength which moved his arm in wielding them to God,—“It is God that girdeth me with strength”—“He teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight.”¹ There is nothing so reasonable or so delightful as this unreserved ascription of all our intellectual powers to “God our Maker, who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven.”² He who thus realizes the property of God in his reasoning faculties, may without arrogance indulge in anticipation of their usefulness, which to a weaker faith, would seem the height of presumption. It is not that he esteems the instrument too highly; but that, viewing it *as God's instrument*, he can set no bounds to its efficiency. He does not imagine that his own arm can bring victory. But through God he knows he shall do valiantly. He enters deeply into the prophet's feelings—“I cannot speak, for I am a child.” But the answer of the Lord is graven upon his memory—“Whatsoever I command thee, thou shalt speak.”³ He is ready to exclaim with Moses—“Who am I, that I should go upon the Lord's errand? I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.” But his diffidence vanishes before the firm assurance that God “will be with his mouth, and teach him what to say.”⁴ To cultivate our reasoning powers with this absolute hopelessness of their single efficacy, and these large expectations from them as instruments in the hand of God, is to bring a certain blessing upon all that we do with them. Hope nothing for yourself. Think nothing too great to hope from the bounty of your God. A firm adherence to this simple rule would enable you to bring your reason to the highest degree of perfection; for God will honor those who thus honor him. “Cease then from your own wisdom.” “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding.”⁵ Sure I am that if your

¹ Psalms xliv. 6; xviii. 32; cxliv. 1.

² Job xxxv. 11.

³ Jeremiah l. 6, 7.

⁴ Exodus iii. 11; iv. 10—12.

⁵ Proverbs xxiii. 4; iii. 5.

trust be thus in the Lord, he will teach you "excellent things in counsels and knowledge." You shall both "know the certainty of the words of truth," and be able to "answer the words of truth to them that send unto you."¹—Again, 'It is the perfection of intellectual enjoyment to receive reason entirely as the gift of our God, and every improvement of it, as a fresh token of his love. Every thing is good, must be good, if we view it in this light. How shall it not be good, if it comes directly from our Father's hand? How shall it not be very good, if sanctioned by our Father's blessing? You know that "a gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it; whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth."² And then—"the blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich; and he addeth no sorrow with it."³ The poorest trifle becomes valuable, if it be the gift of love. But reason is itself a precious stone, a costly gem. When received as a gift it becomes a charmed stone, a talisman to shield from harm, and to insure prosperity. Only acknowledge all your earthly acquirements in this light, and you shall find, that, whichever way you turn them, success shall attend your endeavor. Regard every one of your mental faculties as given to you by creating love. Rejoice in the gift, because redeeming love has restored it to you with a sevenfold blessing. Here is a shield of love, if the shield of faith appear insufficient for your defence. For will not you earnestly guard against the abuse of a thing so given and so blessed?

Her encouragement and advice in the resistance of self-indulgent temptations is truly excellent.

'It is encouraging to reflect, that, if "you are Christ's, all things are yours."⁴ Whatever talents he has given you are yours, freely to use and improve. *They are also his*; therefore you may confidently expect, that he will get glory to himself out of them. And this, if I mistake not, is your wish. Your acquirements are of no value in your eyes, except as you can use them for Christ. Begin, then, and end all your studies with him. Seek to find communion with God in every one of them. "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, and to the glory of God."⁵ The curse which clings to the best of earthly things, and which once shed its baneful influence on all your intellectual faculties, is now taken away in Christ Jesus. Once perhaps your talents might have made you a splendid mischief, a brilliant pest, to society. Now if you use them in faith, they shall be an instrument of healing and of blessing.'

The following closing remarks place the balance between intellectual and Christian wisdom with admirable clearness and beauty.

"On the whole, in attempting to decide upon the true merits of human learning, my readers will not acquit me of the charge of inconsistency, unless they bear in mind the twofold principle upon

¹ Proverbs xxii. 20, § 1.

² Ibid. xvii. 8.

³ Ibid. x. 22.

⁴ 1 Corinthians iii. 22, 23.

⁵ Colossians iii. 17. 1 Corinthians x. 31.

which my assertions are founded, and from which I hope I shall not appear to have deviated. On the one hand, I conceive that to enlarge and strengthen, to cultivate and refine, to enrich and beautify the intellect, is of all the objects of mere earthly attainment, incomparably the most worthy. Viewing study in this light, I cannot but speak in its favor with some degree of liveliness and passion, as one who has tasted, though very slightly, of the benefits which flow from it. On the other hand, when I compare this best of earthly things with the lowest and meanest of heavenly attainments, it sinks ineffably in my esteem; no longer possessing any intrinsic worth, but valuable only from its subserviency to these higher objects. Considering it, therefore, in this point of view, I am exceedingly fearful of overrating its efficacy. I am led to speak of it with the caution due to a pursuit, which is equally capable of becoming a singular blessing, or an extraordinary snare. Thus, when I weigh intellectual cultivation in any earthly balance, I cannot but adjudge to it a decided superiority. But when I place it in the balance of the sanctuary, I perceive that it has no weight at all, but what it derives from the blessings of God on accompanying circumstances. By affixing to human learning any independent value, we take from it that which it really has; for though exceedingly useful as a submissive attendant upon divine knowledge, it can do us nothing but harm, if we permit its entrance as a dominating usurper.

‘We should be less apt to set our hearts upon the pleasures of intellect, if we reflected how much they partake of the evanescent nature of all earthly enjoyments. When this little moment which we call life is fled, of what use shall our studies be to us? Our enlarged faculties will then discern in an instant more than a thousand lives of intense application would now enable us to discover. Our earthly pursuits and attachments are among those “childish things, which we shall put away,” when we arrive at man’s estate. The very best and wisest of them are but the “*summi amores puerorum, qui una cum pretextâ ponentur.*”¹ While, however, we are in this fleeting state of existence, we must not despise those temporary delights and assistances, which the goodness of God has so wonderfully adapted to our imperfection; nor need we fear to avail ourselves of them with due moderation, and a simple dependence upon God’s blessing. But never let it be said of the Christian, that he is so much absorbed in “things temporal,” as to neglect, for one moment, “the things which are eternal.”’

The intrinsic excellence of these remarks render an apology for their introduction needless. The high and general importance of the subject, the full development of its true principles, the solid and expanded views, and above all, the Christian wisdom, spiritual simplicity, and unction which pervade the discussion, will commend it to the profitable attention of every intelligent reader. The treat-

¹ ‘Choice delights of children, which will be laid aside with their pretexta’—the gown worn by the children of the Roman nobility, till it was changed for the toga.

tise itself (the writer here speaks from more competent judgment than his own) might probably be considered by men of science, as not formed upon the more approved system of mathematical study; and, though displaying much power and clearness of mind, is occasionally inaccurate in definition and illustration. The practical and excursive remarks (judging from the preceding extracts, and some others hereafter to be adduced) will however be generally considered to possess no common value.

The writer has been induced to extract so largely from this instructive manuscript, chiefly with a view to two important classes of persons in the present day. In this era of religious excitement, the minds of a large mass are at work, inquiring, or rather speculating in a feverish state of restlessness and perplexity. Their feelings are interested, animated, and more or less intensely occupied with the engrossing subjects now brought before the church. Yet often—among the young especially—whether from defect of education or of mental cultivation, their judgments have little power of discrimination; their principles are confined; and their profession mainly characterized by spiritual dissipation, which exposes them to the besetting snares of a disputatious temper, self-conceit, and self-delusion. To such we would strongly recommend the principles, obligations, and advantages of Christian study, which Miss Graham has so admirably laid out before them. The solid influence of these intellectual habits upon her own character, furnishes the most satisfactory illustration of their importance. So far from diverting her attention from the supreme concerns of eternity, they enabled her, through Divine teaching, the more steadily to concentrate her interest in habitual, enlivening, and practical contemplation.

To those among us, whose habits and pleasures are found in the field of intellect, we cannot but observe, how much they may learn from this highly-gifted saint, of that "simplicity and godly sincerity," that careful inspection of motives, that watchful subordination of natural indulgence to the supreme object of the glory of God, which can alone exclude the blast of Divine jealousy from these legitimate sources of enjoyment. All her views of science were received through a spiritual medium, and elevated her soul to the hallowed atmosphere of communion with her God. The spirit of prayer was the constant guard upon her intellectual studies. Never did she enter upon the daily course of tuition with her young cousin without earnestly imploring the blessing of her heavenly Father. We have already seen a specimen of her spirit of supplication on this interesting subject, upon which it will be well for the student to meditate, till his heart becomes deeply imbued with its simple spirituality and enlargement.¹ How delightful again is the pattern set forth in one of her letters! Speaking of some perplexi-

¹ See her Prayer before Study, pp. 22, 23.

ties relative to the pursuing of her studies, she adds—‘I am now resolved, God helping me, to give this week to prayer; presenting each of my studies to Jesus, that he may prosper and sanctify it by his Spirit, take from it all self-love, and cause me in all my employments, even in the least, to aim at his glory, and to labor in his name. Join with me in this prayer.’¹ Not less instructive is the practical spirit that pervaded her studies. Nothing was done for self-indulgence. Her pursuits were only valuable, in proportion as they were consecrated. In everything “to her to live was Christ.” Nothing besides seemed worthy the name of life. Nothing seemed to command her interest independent of this great object. To a correspondent, who had acquired her sentiments relative to the cultivation of her mind, she writes—‘I think it may be done, *with a prayer, however, and a resolution, that all that we do shall one day be employed in the service of Christ. I think the only thing, is never to lose sight of this great object. And to this end I know no other means than that of making it a subject of prayer.* I have often been prevented from praying for success in study, because I thought it was better only to mention spiritual wants at the throne of grace. *But I now think, that after having asked a blessing upon our common occupations, we are less likely to forget the end, which alone can enable us to follow them without danger.*” Apart from this holy simplicity of principle, (the exclusive character of the Christian Student,) the subtle temptation begins to operate of preferring talent to sound piety; ‘learning,’ as Mr. Baxter tersely remarks—‘is but the pleasing of the fancy in the knowledge of unnecessary things;’² intellectual pleasures are purchased at the fearful expense of the loss of heavenly communion with God. In the cultivation of this spirit, we shall be enabled to honor our God, and to receive his needful aid in literary as well as in religious pursuits. The solid advantages of study will thus be safely enjoyed, the glory of our God and Saviour will be clearly manifested, and his presence realized to the intelligent and active faith of his servants.

But in returning to Miss Graham, we may add, that her studies were not confined to the severer branches of knowledge. She had cultivated an acquaintance with the Roman classics with considerable success.

To one of her correspondents she recommends the study of the Latin Grammar, as the means of a clear understanding of ‘that noble language,’ and of ‘ennobling the intellect by the reading of the poets and historians of that language.’ Two other advantages she notices—that of a more distinct and enlarged acquaintance with our own ‘language; in great part deduced from the Latin,’

¹ See her Prayer before Study, just alluded to. Baxter’s Address to the Blessed Spirit (quoted in another part of this volume) gives a fine illustration of the same self-abased, dependent frame—‘*Without thee, books are senseless scrawls, studies are dreams, learning is a glow-worm, and wit is but wantonness, impertinence, and folly.*’

² Reasons for the Christian Religion. Part II. c. xii.

and that of forming a good style, adding—‘that the English style of a person well instructed in Latin acquires great richness and fertility from the number of classical and energetic words of which it is composed.’ While however in her manuscript she points out the substantial advantages of this instructive field of intellect, she does not fail to advert to the restriction which sound Christian judgment is constrained to impose upon an indiscriminate indulgence. ‘If,’ she observes, ‘we cultivate classic literature with a view only to increase our fund of critical knowledge, we shall miss many of the benefits which we might have derived from pursuing it with a more valuable and extensive design. The true ends of that fascinating study are to impart chasteness and elegance to the style, to enrich the mind with manly sentiments, beautiful images, and poetical associations.’ She elsewhere recommends the cultivation of this field of literature as ‘a corrective to’ what she calls ‘the cold and jejune expression, which marks the style of the mere mathematician. I acknowledge,’ she adds, ‘the Christian objections that are urged, not without weight, against the study of the ancient authors.¹ I am only advocating them under proper restrictions, and with due moderation. Thus guarded from abuse, let them walk hand in hand with the more abstruse sciences. They will mutually aid and correct each other. A high degree of classic elegance is consistent with strong powers of sound argumentation. The combination forms a style of reasoning as pleasing as it is convincing. The simplicity of a mathematical style is thus kept from degenerating into poverty, and its cautious correctness is not permitted to stiffen into a frozen sterility.’

In the field of modern literature and taste, she was perfectly familiar with the French, Italian, and Spanish languages. For the first two she had proper masters. The last she learnt from a Castilian, who was introduced to her father’s house, in exchange for teaching him her own language. In order to improve herself in the knowledge of the languages, she made considerable use of them in mutual correspondence with her young friends. For the same purpose she translated Goldsmith’s *Vicar of Wakefield* (a work not congenial to her taste, but selected as a good specimen of English style) into French, Latin, and Spanish, and commenced an Italian Version. She made a similar use of *Gil Blas*, to perfect herself in the Spanish language for an important object, which will shortly be noticed at length. She appears, however, to have ultimately relinquished this work, for a reason equally characteristic of her good sense and Christian simplicity. ‘Should I become?’—she writes to her correspondent—‘perfect mistress of the

¹ These objections, so far as they are valid, refer mainly to the mode of study or instruction, without any reference to the Divine standard of the book of God; thus leaving the mind open to the influence of all that is corrupt both in principle and practice. Under a wise Christian discipline, however, much enlargement of mind and varied interest will be gained from this source; added to what is of primary moment,—the sound learning so necessary to a just interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures.

pleasing and pregnant style of Gil Blas (of which I intend to write at least two volumes), it would be almost too light for the serious subject on which I wish to write.' In the same spirit the project even of these two volumes seem to have been quickly laid aside. The next week she writes to the same correspondent—'I told you that I had begun to write Gil Blas very diligently. *But yesterday I thought of the folly of thus employing myself about a work in which I wished Christ to do all. I am therefore determined to give the remainder of this week and the following to reading the Bible with prayer.*'

The best English writers were familiar to her, especially the standard works connected with the Philosophy of the Mind. She appears to have made herself thoroughly acquainted with the principles of Locke. She speaks in one of her letters of reading his important Essay on the Conduct of the Understanding for the twentieth time with renewed interest, and recommends to her correspondent the study of this work with great earnestness, as the means of giving her an increased thirst for pursuits purely intellectual. Stewart was read with much improvement to herself. Butler's Analogy also was upon her first shelf. The following letter to her cousin gives a lively and intelligent view of her interest in these valuable writers.

'Hastings, July 26, 1823.

'I am very glad that you like Butler. I found, as you do, not only that he is humble himself, but that he inspires his readers with sentiments of humility. He shows them the littleness of human reason, and how weak it is, where it will not submit to the light of revelation. I will tell you what the good Stewart has done for me. I have long felt that all the efforts I have made to obtain true knowledge have been almost useless. Stewart has shown me the reason of this. It is because I have always allowed the greatest confusion of my ideas. I have never arranged them. He has shown me that my mind is like a large sack filled with rubbish of all kinds, and where perhaps something that is useful may be found: but all is packed together in so confused a manner, that whosoever sought for it would be seeking a needle in a bottle of hay. I am almost in despair; however, I am resolved to make every effort to arrange a little better the confused mass; and I am more than ever convinced, that the only sure way of having the head filled with clear and well-defined ideas is, to accustom oneself to put one's thoughts upon paper. I must tell you a resolution which I desire to execute; it is to write down from time to time all the new ideas and facts, whether original or acquired by reading or conversation, which I have gained. By doing this we should know the progress which our minds make; and we should not forget, as we now do, the ideas which pass through the mind without making any impression, but which might be very useful if gathered together, and reserved to a proper occasion.'

Her acquaintance with the Greek language only extended to the reading of the Greek Testament. The further progress in this department of literature was hindered by her application to other studies necessary for the superintendence of the education of her cousin. She was proposing to commence the study of Hebrew, but increasing indisposition precluded her from renewing her habits of application in any fresh track of interesting exercise.

Miss Graham studied the theory of music with much attention, and wrote a short but correct development of its principles¹ for the use of a young cousin, then preparing for the situation of governess, and whom she had in part educated for this important sphere with anxious pains and interest. Apart from this object she would not probably have devoted so large a portion of her valuable time to this study, as it was a matter of frequent concern to her, to observe the preponderance given to this elegant and fascinating science, above the more solid and useful accomplishments.

In some of her more lively exercises of mind she took up the subject of chemistry with great delight, making long extracts from the books which she read, and going over every part till she thoroughly understood it. Without having any more definite object for this study, she felt that some absorbing occupation of this character was necessary to beguile the long and wearisome hours of sickness. For the same object botany also attracted her attention. Thus with various and successive occupations her mind was always maintained in active, intelligent, and profitable exercise. A striking feature of her character (one which entered into her recreations equally with her studies, and which formed the basis of her high mental superiority) was a total concentration of every power of thought and feeling in the object of pursuit immediately before her.² Indeed, as her father observes, 'she followed Solomon's advice in everything she undertook—"Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might!"'³

Her peculiar singleness of aim preserved her, in the midst of her intellectual enjoyments, from the baneful influence of self-indulgence, and stimulated her to apply her literary pursuits to valuable practical purposes. Her great object in the study of the Spanish

¹ A Letter to a young Pianoforte player.

² One of her letters gives a graphical picture of this remarkable concentration of mind.
'Plymouth, May 10, 1825.

'When the fury of learning takes possession of me, I cannot think of anything else. If I am seized with a fit for studying any particular thing, I cannot give my mind to any other studies, however much I usually delight in them. I now wish to study Spanish and Music. But I am so carried away with my ancient mania for Mathematics, that, although my head aches, and I cannot think without inconvenience of anything, I am perpetually puzzling my brains to resolve questions, which will never be of any use to me. It is said, that everything is given for some good. I cannot imagine why I have been endued with this invincible propensity to a study, which is always diverting me from more useful and feminine occupations.' This letter, it will be remarked, was written several years before her Treatise on Mathematical Study, and before the important intellectual and moral benefit of that study, which her Treatise so fully develops, had opened to her mind.

³ Eccles. ix. 19.

language, was to obtain a medium of communication with the Spanish refugees. The discovery of a strong tincture of infidelity among them, combined with the recollection of her own fall, to excite a compassionate, earnest, and sympathizing concern on their behalf. The second part of 'The Test of Truth' opens with an exquisitely touching view of her feelings on this painful subject. Indeed the work contains the substance of her communications with some of those interesting but unhappy men. It was sent to them with much and earnest prayer upon the eve of their departure from England. She had intended to have translated some of the most striking extracts from Paley and other writers upon the Evidences of Christianity; and in one of her letters she mentions having no less than eleven English volumes before her mind for this purpose. Finding, however, that Paley had been translated, she purchased the work, and sent it to her Spanish friends with her own.

The following notices will give an interesting view of the exercises of her mind and faith, which were strongly called out towards these objects of her compassion, after she was removed from immediate intercourse with them.

' Sept. 8, 1825.

'As to my Spanish, we have been so busy about the schools, that I have not been able to do much. *But I find a delightful confidence, that this book having been the suggestion of Christ, and belonging to him and not to me, will be blessed by him.* I have read one part of 'Las Ruinas,' and in reading it I was struck with the reflection, that the best answer would be a continual reference to the word of God. I thought therefore of placing my observations on the blank pages, and of filling the margin of the printed paper with references. I beseech you to pray, that if I be not a fit instrument for the conversion of the souls of these poor Spanish exiles, the Holy Spirit would be pleased to raise up some other.'

Miss Graham obtained a copy of the book, interleaved with blank paper for the insertion of her remarks. It appears, however, from this copy, now in the writer's possession, that she made very little progress in this task, probably thinking that the simple argument of "The Test of Truth" was better adapted for her purpose.

' April 9, 1827.

'Last week my blessed Master gave me the power of writing in his name to the poor Spaniards. I have written three sheets in English. But as I have not studied Spanish for a long time, I find myself in some difficulty, and must give this week to the language. Next week I hope to translate what I have written, and to send it to you; if you will oblige me by seeing it put into their hands. My faith in seeing them converted to God increases every day. At present, "the strong man armed keepeth his palace, and his goods

¹ Volney's Ruins of Empires, translated into the Spanish—an infidel work of much authority with her Spanish friends.

are at peace." But I have confidence given me from heaven, that I shall see the "stronger than he," who will conquer him, and "take from him all his armor wherein he trusted."¹ I may not perhaps see this while I am here; but I shall not rejoice the less, because I see it in heaven.'

About a month afterwards, we find her mind deeply exercised upon this work and labor of love.

' *May 5, 1827.*

'I wrote the Spanish book in the name of Jesus, and in the belief that he would give me a spirit and a wisdom, which by nature I do not possess. I *had* a strong faith in the promises of God, to manifest himself in his own time to his own elect. But in the way of preparing to send it, my faith vanishes, and I have now only "an evil heart of unbelief."² To say to all the bones in the churchyard at Stoke—"O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord,"³ would almost seem to me easier than to say the same thing to souls dead in infidelity. However, I feel that I have courage even for this, since "Jesus is the resurrection and the life," because all the glory will be to him alone; and because he has assured me, that, having confided myself to him, my expectations can never be disappointed.'

The next letter was sent some months afterwards, with 'The Test of Truth,' and 'Paley's Evidences.'

' *Dec. 20, 1827.*

'I send you Paley, which pleases me very much, with the letter, in which, without entering upon any argument about the Evidences, &c., I have leant upon the simple proposition, that God having promised in the Scriptures to give his Spirit to whoever asks it with sincerity, must either keep his promise, or not be God; and I have endeavored to show them, that according to their own principles they are without excuse, if they neglect to seek their Creator in this manner. But if even now it do not succeed, it has been a blessing to me; it has been the cause of many prayers, of many sweet moments of communion with Jesus. I cannot therefore but hope, that in the time and manner which may please him, my prayers will be answered. I recommend these unhappy people to you. Pray for them often and fervently; possibly amongst them may be found some of those who were "chosen before the foundation of the world."'

In another letter formerly quoted, after having begged her friend to join with her in prayer for a blessing upon her studies, she added

¹ Luke xi. 21, 22.

² This book was 'The Test of Truth.' Her care and anxiety for them extended to their temporal, as well as their spiritual distresses. As a token of affectionate sympathy, as well as some acknowledgment for valuable instruction received, she gladly appropriated the proceeds of her musical Tract to the fund raised for their relief.

³ Ezek. xxxvii. 4.

in conclusion,—‘And pray for me, that I may have something to say to those poor Spaniards, and that my love for them may not grow cold.’

The full result of her prayers and “trials of faith” on behalf of her Spanish friends, is among the secrets which “the day will declare.” Meanwhile what Christian can fail to be invigorated by this exhibition of prayer, faith, self-denial, and patient hope in the work of our Divine Master?

Allusion has been already made¹ to a disinterested project which she had formed of devoting herself to the work of tuition. To her cousin she writes, as if her heart was full of it—‘I think of it day and night. The opportunity of my illness appears to me excellent for preparing myself for my plan, *if the ability for putting it into execution should be granted me.*’ Her gracious Lord however was pleased to accept her in the desire,² not in the performance of her work. Protracted indisposition hindered her from giving any definite shape or execution to the plan, which only remains on record, as one among the many instances of the ceaseless activity with which her energies were employed in the service of her Redeemer, and of his Church.

It is natural to expect to see her a “fellow-worker with God,” in the daily course of active devotedness. She was a constant visitor of the poor in the most miserable abodes, under circumstances trying to her delicate frame and tender spirit. For some time she took a daily and somewhat distant walk through an uninviting part of the city, to spend an hour with a dying young woman, whose case had deeply interested her, and to whom there is every reason to believe that she was found the blessed messenger of life and salvation. Her sympathy was much called out by the temporal wants of the poor. Much of her leisure time was employed in working for their benefit. A large chest of useful articles of clothing, was constantly kept in her own room, while the opportunities of distribution were always improved as means of spiritual instruction to the objects of her consideration. Her sabbaths were entirely devoted to the service of God. She became a teacher in the Christ Church Sunday School, and though she was often exhausted at the close of the day by the continued excitement of her exertion, yet she ever counted her toil in the work of Christ to be her highest privilege and delight.

Upon her removal from London, the interest of her intellectual mind continued to be called forth in the employment of a village sphere. A deep and habitual constraint of redeeming love regulated every mental effort. Though she diligently improved her retirement in adding to her already well-furnished storehouse; yet she chiefly regarded it as the means of secretly recruiting her strength for the service of God. Hers was not the mind to repose luxuriously in ‘the Castle of Indolence.’ Hers was not the soul that could rest even in spiritual self-indulgence, insensible to the

¹ See page 23, note.

² 2 Chronicles vi. 8.

urgent calls of active duty. Even her delicate health was not suffered to preclude her from the self-denying exercise of Christian devotedness. During the first summer of her country residence, she regularly attended at the parish workhouse at seven o'clock, to explain the Scriptures to the poor previous to the commencement of their daily labor. This, however, like every other "labor of love," was an exercise of her faith, and conflict with the great enemy. She mentions to her cousin the repugnance which at one time she found to this work, and her yielding to the temptation of deferring it from day to day. Yet it was not long before she found the victory of faith over inertia; and gladly did she give the praise to Him, who enabled her to make a successful effort; 'I told them of my intention'—she writes—'to go every morning to pray with them and read the word of God. *My Saviour removed every difficulty out of the way, and caused the women to receive me with the greatest civility.*'

The children of the parish were the objects of constant solicitude. She wrote a few simple addresses for their use. She drew out also questions upon the parables and miracles, for the assistance of the Sunday School Teachers;¹ and, when prevented by indisposition from attending the school, she assembled the children at her own house for scriptural instruction. The young women also in the parish occupied a large share of her anxious interest; and, finding them unwilling to assemble at the same time and place with the children, she appropriated a separate evening for their instruction. She was, as might be supposed, a constant cottage visitor. The following beautiful extract from her mathematical manuscript will show the high and consecrated spirit with which she connected this humble ministration with her intellectual pleasures. Warning her Christian student of the dangerous snare of self-complacency,² she inquires of him—'Do you ever experience this proud internal consciousness of superior genius or learning? God has placed a ready antidote within your reach. The abode of learned leisure is seldom far from the humble dwelling of some unlettered Christian. Thither

¹ Some of these Addresses and Questions have since been published by the Rev. H. A. Simcoe. (Secleys)

² Her remarks upon self-complacency are so just and searching, that the Writer is tempted to add them in a note:

'*Self-complacency* is another of those temptations, to which the student is peculiarly exposed. He may so far distrust his own heart, as to abstain from "doing anything through strife or vain-glory." He may keep out of the way of human praise. And yet there may be an inward complacency, a proud consciousness of superiority, equally destructive to his growth in grace. He "thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think." He courts not the breath of applause: but he drinks in the intoxicating vapor of self-gratulation and esteem. There are some men, in whom pride stifles the impulses of vanity. If they seem to care little what others think of them, it is because they think so well of themselves. Their own opinion needs no confirmation. Their solitary plaudits is so abundantly satisfactory, that the buzz of admiring multitudes would be a superfluous addition. Can anything like this be found in the disciple of Jesus? Yes—for the law of sin still dwells in his members. Neither this sin, nor any other shall be permitted to have dominion. (Romans vi. 14.) But its assaults will sometimes vex and discompose him. He will be tempted, according to the natural bent of his character, to seek the applause of others, or to rest in his own.'

let your steps be directed. "Take sweet counsel" with your poor uneducated brother. There you will find the man, whom our "King delighteth to honor." His mean chamber, graced with one well-worn book, is as "the house of God, and the very gate of heaven." Observe how far the simplicity of his faith, and the fervor of his love, exceed anything you can find in your own experience, cankered as it is with intellectual pride. God has taught him many lessons, of which all your learning has left you ignorant. Make him your instructor in spiritual things. He is a stranger to the names of your favorite poets and orators. But he is very familiar with "the sweet Psalmist of Israel." He can give you rich portions of the eloquence of one, who "spake as never man spake." He can neither "tell you the number of the stars, nor call them all by their names." But he will discourse excellently concerning "the star of Bethlehem." He is unable to attempt the solution of a difficult problem. But he can enter into some of those deep things of God's law, which to an unhumiliated heart are dark and mysterious. He will not talk to you "in the words which man's wisdom teacheth;" but oh! what sweet and simple expressions of Divine love are those which "the Holy Ghost has taught him!" He "knows nothing but Christ crucified;" but this is the excellent knowledge, to which all other knowledge is foolishness. He has "the fear of the Lord; that is wisdom. He departs from evil; that is understanding."¹ When your soul is refreshed by this simple and lowly communion with one of the meanest of God's saints; return to your learned retirement. Look over your intellectual possessions. Choose out the brightest jewel in your literary cabinet. Place it by the side of "the meek and quiet spirit" of this obscure Christian. Determine which is the "ornament of greater price."² Compare the boasted treasures of your mind with the spiritual riches of your illiterate brother. Run over the whole catalogue. Let not one be omitted; the depth of your understanding, the strength of your reasonings, the brilliancy of your fancy, the fire of your eloquence. Be proud of them. Glory in them. You cannot. They dwindle into insignificance. They appear to you "as a drop of a bucket, as the small dust of the balance."

The following letter gives a beautiful illustration of the truly Christian spirit, with which she inculcated upon her friends the responsibility of persevering effort in the work of God:

'Stoke, August 4, 1825.

'I think that visiting the poor is an excellent help to spirituality of mind, because it shows us our own weakness, when we lose sight for a moment of the strength of Christ. It also brings to light many secret corruptions, of which we were before ignorant. I am very anxious to hear about the Infant School. Do not be discouraged by the cold answers of —. Rather pray for them, that more faith

¹ Job xxviii. 28.

² 1 Peter iii. 4.

may be given to them, and a spirit of love for the souls that are perishing around them. Such a prayer offered in faith by one Christian for another will bring down a blessing upon both. I am very sorry that I was angry with —, instead of praying for her. I do not think that Christians pray enough for each other. Perhaps the Lord is proving your faith and love by making you wait in this cause. If it be so, do not doubt his power to carry you through all you undertake in his name. From the mouth of the children for whom you are interested, he will cause his praises to be sounded. Do “not” then, “be weary in well-doing.” If you have not already begun, let me advise you not to begin, till you have given a special time to the Scriptures and to prayer. I desire all our undertakings to be “sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” Then—referring to her own intention of setting apart the next week for spiritual exercises in reference to her Spanish communications—she asks—‘I thought perhaps that you would give next week to these things, and that it would be delightful to me to remember, that we were both thus employed at the same time. But if you cannot do this, pray at the time fixed by us, that I may have grace and faith to pass these days in dedicating myself to this work, and that we may both of us in all that we do be delivered from a self-seeking spirit, and may take every step with our eyes fixed upon the cross of Jesus. I am afraid of annoying you by this mode of speaking of these things. But if you knew how full my heart is of tenderness, while I write, you would pardon the importunity, with which I beseech you to give yourself entirely and without reserve into the hands of Christ. He can give you from the treasures of his grace all the zeal, love, and warmth which you need. All is ours already by virtue of his blood. Let us make use of it. Let us go to him in holy boldness, and ask for all the grace which he is so ready to give.’ Psalm lxxxi. 10.

The pressure, however, of increasing illness constrained her to relinquish her own habits of personal activity for some time previous to her death. It was her appointed dispensation rather to suffer, than to do her heavenly Father’s will; while her solitary hours were cheered by the contemplation of the glorious prospects opening upon her view—“*looking for the mercy of her Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*”¹

¹ Jude xii.

CHAPTER IV.

FURTHER EXTRACTS FROM HER WRITINGS AND CORRESPONDENCE.

It is not to be expected, that the quiet tenor of Miss Graham's habits in a retired village could furnish much variety of incident or detail. We shall, however, abundantly compensate for this deficiency by a more full exhibition of her fine, powerful, and spiritual mind, as illustrated in her writings and correspondence.

But this department of our work is too large to be comprehended in one mass. We will therefore set it forth in several distinct divisions, and give her sentiments *upon the fundamental Doctrines of the Gospel—upon subjects of interesting Theological discussion—upon some points of moment connected with Christian Experience and Profession—and upon Miscellaneous Subjects.*

1. HER VIEWS OF THE GREAT DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL.

Her apprehensions and statements of the grand fundamentals of the Christian faith were eminently scriptural.

On the humbling doctrine of Original Sin, she justly remarks in a posthumous work:¹—

‘It is the very first lesson in the school of Christ: and it is only by being well rooted and grounded in these first principles, that we can hope to go on to perfection. The doctrine is written in Scripture as with a sunbean. If we do not feel some conviction of it in our own hearts, it affords a sad proof that we still belong to that “generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.”’²

After adducing some of the most convincing scriptural evidence, she proceeds forcibly to illustrate the subject by the case of Infants.

¹ “The Freeness and Sovereignty of God's *Justifying and Electing Grace.*” Notwithstanding the inversion of Scriptural order in the Title (which her mode of discussion unfortunately required,) and one or two incidental inaccuracies of exposition, its statements of Divine truth are full, clear, encouraging, and practical. The substance of the work was written about four years before her death, in a letter to a serious relative, with the desire to impart to her mind a more clear and comprehensive knowledge of the system of the Gospel. She brought it into its present form during her last illness, and lived only to correct the first two proof-sheets. Her object in publication is stated in her communication to the venerable Minister, to whom she wished to have dedicated the work—‘Now that I have experienced the exceeding comfort and delight, which a clear view of God's sovereign, absolute, free, and unmerited salvation affords in the near prospect of eternity, I am very desirous to make my poor testimony to these truths public, in the hope that God will bless it to others. For I know that success “is not of him that planteth, nor of him that watereth, but of God that giveth the increase.”’

² Prov. xxx. 12. pp. 8, 9.

‘Would we know the *reason* of this indelible pollution, which fallen man has transmitted to his latest descendants? let that given by Scripture suffice—“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.”¹ But is not the new-born babe innocent? yes, from the commission of actual sin; but not from the pollution of a nature altogether sinful: for “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” “Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”² Why then is death so often commissioned to snatch away the babe in the first hour of its existence?—why, but because that babe is a sinful creature? Sin, that root of bitterness, has already shot its fibres into the inmost soul. That infant “born of the flesh, is flesh;”³ and “as such cannot please God”⁴—cannot bring forth any other than the accursed fruits of the flesh. As surely as the cockatrice’s egg will hatch into a viper, so surely will the babe born of unclean parents, be itself unclean—so surely it will be “by nature a child of wrath, even as others.”⁵ And therefore it is as the apostle tells us, that “Death reigneth over all, *even over them that have not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.*”⁶ I entertain not a doubt that these little ones are redeemed by the blood of Jesus: but that they *need* redemption, that they are *sinner*s, “children of wrath by nature,”—of this truth I am equally well assured; and every little mound in the church-yard seems to have a voice that tells me so.⁷

Then after citing our Church’s recognition of this doctrine in the Ordinance of Infant Baptism, she returns to her scriptural ground of argument.

‘The Holy Ghost has instructed the Apostle to give us such a full comment upon the spiritual death we all die in Adam, that we cannot too often read and pray over the following passages: Rom. v. 12, 21; 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22, 45, 49; Eph. iv. 22, 24. Col. iii. 9, 10. There are many others, in which our nature in Adam is spoken of, in contradistinction to the new and holy nature we receive in Christ Jesus. So essential is a right understanding of this truth, that until we receive it, many of the most beautiful parts of the Church service must appear just as unintelligible to us as it they were written in an unknown language. Nay—worse than unintelligible—they must seem extremely foolish and ridiculous. How absurd (to an understanding not convinced of the original defilement of our nature) must it appear to talk of remitting an infant’s sins; of causing the Old Adam to be buried, and his carnal affections to die in him;⁸ while all the time the hearer thinks that the infant as yet has *no sin*, *no carnal affections*,—while the very existence of the Old Adam or original sin is doubted by him!⁹

The sacred records of Christian experience furnish full confirmation of her humiliating statement.

‘Oh! what an unmeaning heap of words,’—she exclaims—‘has

¹ Job xiv. 4.

⁴ Rom. viii. 8.

⁷ Page 308.

² Rom. v. 12.

⁵ Eph. ii. 3.

⁸ See the Baptismal Service.

³ John iii. 6.

⁶ Rom. v. 14.

⁹ Page 14.

been handed down to us in the law of Moses, the Psalms of David, the confessions of Ezra, Nehemiah, Job, Daniel, Jeremiah, and the rest of God's saints, if that evil nature which caused them to groan did not really exist! Above all—what shall we make of Romans iii. and vii.? What shall we understand by the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit,¹ between the old man and the new man, between the carnal and spiritual affections? Was St. Paul dreaming, when he said—"I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing?"² Was he beside himself, when he declared "that he found in himself a law, that when he would do good, evil was present with him?"³ that, though by Divine grace he had learnt "to delight in the law of God after the inward man, yet still he saw another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members?"⁴ The Apostle of the Gentiles, "who labored more abundantly than they all:"⁵ he, who "had been caught up to the third heaven, and heard unspeakable words which it was not lawful for him to utter"⁶ amongst sinful men; he, who "counted all things but dung, that he might win Christ;"⁷ he, who was "ready, not only to be bound, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus;"⁸ this chosen vessel of mercy, full of zeal and full of love, and *under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost*, so groaned under the burden of the original corruption of his nature—"the law of sin warring in his members;" that he was compelled to cry out—"O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"⁹ And from the time of Paul there has never been a real Christian, who has not often felt himself constrained to adopt this language, and to say in the anguish of his soul—"who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The remedy, as is usual in Scripture, follows close upon the complaint: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."¹⁰

From her Mathematical Manuscript we extract the following method of proof of the total depravity of man. In speaking of the three modes of demonstration—Inference, Coincidence, and *Reductio ad absurdum*¹¹—she thus applies the last mode to the subject alluded to—"If man be not utterly depraved, he must be in one of these two states—either perfectly good, without any mixture of sin; or good, with some admixture of evil and imperfection. The first of these suppositions carries its own absurdity upon the face of it. The second is plausible, and more generally received. Yet it is not difficult to prove, that if man had any remaining good in him, that is,—towards God—he could not possibly be the creature that he now is. There could not be that carelessness about his eternal welfare, that deadness to spiritual things, which we per-

¹ Gal. v. 17.

⁴ Rom. v. 22, 23.

⁷ Phil. iii. 8.

¹⁰ Rom. vii. 25. Page 14.

² Rom. vii. 18.

⁵ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

⁸ Acts xxi. 13.

³ Ib. v. 21.

⁶ 2 Cor. xii. 2, 4.

⁹ Rom. vii. 24.

¹¹ i. e. The contrary hypothesis necessarily involving an absurdity.

ceive in every individual, whose heart has not been renewed by Divine grace. Man would not love pleasure more than God. He would not prefer "the things which are seen and which are temporal" to "the things that are not seen and are eternal." He would not trifle with sin. He would not sneer at holiness. He would not habitually neglect to pray.

"All these things are utterly incompatible with the hypothesis, that man is only partially fallen from God. The very least spark of innate godliness would imply a restless dissatisfaction in what is evil; an importunate longing to be freed from it. The man in whom such a spark of goodness existed, would breathe after lost communion with his Maker. He would prefer God's will and pleasure to his own. "The honor that cometh from God only" would be dearer to him than the most splendid tribute of human applause. Is anything like this to be found in man before his reception of Divine grace? No—He "lives without God in the world:" chooses his own will and pleasure, and seeks his own glory. *He is utterly selfish; therefore he is utterly fallen.*

"We find then that the doctrine of man's partial depravity involves absurd consequences. It leads to conclusions which are wholly at variance with fact. These reflections bring us back to the Scripture statement. We admit that the heart of man may yet be the seat of many noble and tender affections *towards his fellow-men.* But in regard to God, we declare his affections to be alienated, his understanding darkened, his will depraved. "There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."¹

The utter helplessness of man she adduces with great clearness and power, to prove that the work of grace, from its earliest commencement to its final consummation, is "all of God."

"Grace will be given"—she observes—"to all who diligently seek for it. But, if we attend to the Scripture account of every man, woman, and child by nature, we shall find that this seeking also is the *effect following upon grace received; not the cause producing it.* By this I mean to say, that the very act of *seeking grace* proves that *we have received grace already;* and that the very ability to seek, is itself the *free gift* of God's sovereign grace. If "every thought of man's heart is evil, and that *continually,*"² surely it is not out of that heart that the first desire of any good thing can spring. If, by nature, "there is *none that seeketh after God,*"³ whence can the first attempt to seek him arise, but from free grace drawing us *contrary to nature?* Freely must grace be given to enable us to seek at first; and freely must it be continued, to enable us to go on seeking. I know that *none shall seek the Lord in vain; none who come shall be cast out; none who believe shall come short of everlasting life; none who choose the better part*

¹ Psalm xiv. 2, 3. Rom. iii. 10—12.

² Gen. vi. 5.

³ Rom. iii. 11.

shall have it taken from them;¹ but then *none can seek the Lord, unless he first seek them.*² *None can come, except it be given them of the Father;—none can believe, save as many as are ordained to eternal life; None can choose Christ, except he first choose them.*³ If, again, we consider the magnitude of the change, which must take place in every sinner's heart before he can truly and earnestly seek God, we shall be convinced that no part of it is properly his own. He must "be born again;"⁴ must become a new creature; *old things must pass away, all things must become new;*⁵ he must "pass from death unto life;"⁶ "from darkness to light—from the power of Satan unto God"⁷—"from going about to establish his own righteousness, to submit himself to the righteousness of God;"⁸ and this, to a proud carnal heart, is the most difficult of all. And who is sufficient for these things? Who but He that first formed us in the womb, can cause us to be born again of the Spirit? Who but He that originally created us, is able to "create us anew in Christ Jesus?" Who but the giver of natural life can give spiritual life; "and quicken those that were dead in trespasses and sins?"⁹

When the Lord of life stood by the grave of Lazarus and said—"Lazarus come forth; and he that was dead, instantly came forth;"¹⁰ who would say, that this act of lifting himself up was the cause of his coming to life; and not rather, that his coming to life was the cause of his being able to lift himself up? It is thus, when Jesus by his word and Spirit says to the heart of a sinner—"Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."¹¹ Instantly that dead soul arises, and its first act is seeking, or prayer; but this same act of seeking is the *effect* of spiritual life, not the *cause*. We pray *because we are alive, not that we may live*. We cannot quicken ourselves when dead in sin, any more than we can bring a dead body to life. But when *Jesus* has quickened us, we shall as surely perform all those actions, which demonstrate the soul to be spiritually alive, as a dead body when raised by Divine power, will surely perform all the functions of a living person. Grace, great grace, must be infused, to enable us to seek at all; and He who first gave grace to seek, will give *more* grace in answer to that seeking, thus fulfilling that precious scripture which saith—"To him that hath, shall be given."¹² We neither *begin* nor *carry on* the work of grace in our own hearts. "Jesus is the *author* and *finisher*," the *Alpha* and *Omega*, "of our faith."¹³ From the first spark of grace that faintly glimmers upon us here, to the full blaze of glory which shall burst upon us in heaven; *all, all is his doing*; it is *he* that made us alive (spiritually,) not we ourselves. It is God who both *begins* the

¹ Isaiah xlv. 19. John vi. 37, 40. Luke x. 42.

² John x. 16. Ezek. xxxiv. 14. Luke xix. 10. Psalm cxix. 176. Eph. ii. 13.

³ John vi. 65; xv. 16. Acts xiii. 43. ⁴ John iii. 3. ⁵ 2 Cor. v. 17.

⁶ 1 John iii. 14. ⁷ Acts xxvi. 18. 1 Peter ii. 9.

⁸ Rom. x. 3. ⁹ Ephesians ii. 1. ¹⁰ John xi. 43, 44. ¹¹ Ephesians v. 14.

¹² Matt. xiii. 12.

¹³ Heb. xii. 2.

good work in us, and also will "perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ."¹

Then, after having confirmed her statement by the strong and unequivocal language of the Church, she proceeds to exhibit in connection with it, *the perfect freeness of Divine grace.*

'It is absolutely necessary to a clear and full view of this doctrine, that we ascribe to the *free, sovereign, and unmerited* grace of God, the first desire after him that ever arose in our hearts, as well as the fulfilling of that desire, when expressed in prayer. We must be convinced that *nothing* in the work of salvation is *our own*, but only the gift of God's love to us in Christ Jesus. Christ died for us when we were enemies.² The benefits of his death are applied to us, *for the purpose* of reconciling us, not in consequence of *our* making any advances towards being reconciled. He "died for the *ungodly*," for those who were "*without strength*,"³ without strength to come to Him; without strength to form so much as a wish to come to Him. The *desire* to come is *given for His sake*: the *ability* to come is given *for His sake*; the *acceptance on coming* is an acceptance *for the beloved sake of this beloved Saviour*, "without whom we can do nothing."⁴ Those who say—"Grace will be given if we ask; but then asking must *precede* or *procure* the given grace"—are in effect robbing God of much of the glory due unto his name. For the power and the inclination to ask are of themselves a part of the free gift of God's grace to us in Christ Jesus. They are the beginning of God's work in the heart; and to say, that we begin this work, is no other than to say that we can create ourselves anew in Christ Jesus. I will venture to affirm, that if God *waited* to give us his grace till we asked him for it of our own accord, we should go without it to all eternity.

'The great source of error on this head, even amongst serious people, is, that they cannot bring themselves to think they have *nothing of their own* in the work of salvation. Therefore it is, that, when constrained to acknowledge that the grace given them *when they seek*, is from God only; their self-righteousness betakes

¹ Phil. i. 6. *Freeness of Grace*, pp. 48—51. While however she lays down the fundamental principle, that in the work of salvation "all is of God," she insists upon the necessity of rational means in connection with Divine agency. 'The Spirit alone,' she observes in her manuscript—"can "convince of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." (John xvi. 8.) But then he does so *by means of our understandings—not in despite of them.* He who first made us reasonable beings, acts upon us in a way suited to our reason. He gives us no new faculties, but enables us for the right use of those which we already have: There cannot be a greater mistake than the separation which some make between the operation of the Spirit, and the process of rational conviction. They are related to each other as the cause to the effect. The Spirit of God alone "guides into all truth," (John xvi. 13,) yet not by urging us on blindfold with headlong impulse. He opens our eyes, and pours in the light from above. The eyes which he opens are "the eyes of our understanding." (Eph. i. 18.) The light which he sheds forth is the steady light of rational and sober conviction. It is not the cold moonshine of formality, which only plays round the head. It is not the false glare of enthusiasm, which only dazzles the imagination. *His* is that piercing beam, which, while it illuminates and convinces the understanding, purifies and converts the heart.'

² Rom. v. 10.

³ *Ibid.* 6.

⁴ John xv. 5.

itself to another stronghold ; and we find them laying claim to their *asking* and *seeking*, as if *that* at least was the effort of their own will, the spontaneous act of their own power. This is just as if one should take a dead person by the hand, breathe life into him, and lift him up upon his feet ; and that person should make a show of acknowledgment to his benefactor, by allowing to that benefactor the praise of lifting him up *after* he was alive, and keeping him alive ever since, and yet should maintain, that the *first breath of all* came into him by his own spontaneous act, by the effort of his own assisted power. The absurdity of such an assertion with regard to temporal life, would strike us at once ; but we are not so struck with it in reference to spiritual life ; and the reason is this : when we speak of a corpse, we know what we speak about ; there it lies before our eyes, incapable of breathing, moving, speaking. We perfectly know what we mean, when we say that a dead *body* cannot raise itself to life. But when we speak of a *soul* “dead in trespasses and sins,” we too often use the phrase, merely because we find it in the Scriptures : without the slightest conception of the awful reality expressed by it. Nor is it till we have ourselves in some measure “passed from death unto life,” that we begin to perceive the dreadful and close analogy, which really exists between the two states of natural and spiritual death. If God were to come to an unconverted person with the question—not—“Can these dry bones?”—but Can these dead souls—“live?” he would be apt to reply—Why not? What should hinder them from raising themselves up, and breathing the breath of spiritual life? But when God has quickened us from our own death in trespasses and sins, our eyes are open to see what spiritual death really is, and then we learn with trembling awe to reply, “Lord, thou knowest :”¹ this is thy work : it is thou that must make us to live, and not we ourselves.’

‘Since, then, men are universally disposed to “go about establishing their own righteousness,” how carefully ought we to close up every avenue, through which this besetting sin might gain admittance, and rob us of our peace, by leading us to rob Christ of his praise! Many are the windings of our own treacherous hearts ; many are the devices of Satan, by which he would tempt us to ascribe to our own strength, what God hath done for us of his mere mercy. Nor let us think that a mistake here can be of trifling importance. God is very jealous for his great name ; and he has declared, that “if we will not lay it to heart, to give glory to his name, he will send a curse upon us, and will even curse our blessings.”² Many and glorious are the crowns which adorn the sacred head of Immanuel. Let us not try to pluck thence the brightest and fairest of them all : for well does it become this King of kings. When we reach heaven, and receive the crown of glory, we shall be ready enough to cast *that* at his feet, and to say, Thou *only* art worthy.

¹ Ezek. xxxvii. 3.

² Mal. ii. 2.

Let us do the same with the crown of grace here; for surely we have as little right to arrogate the one to ourselves as the other.¹

These Scriptural statements of man's total corruption are well connected with *the calls of the Gospel*—not as implying man's natural free-will and power to turn to God; but as displaying the riches of Divine grace, as stamping the mark of guilt upon the moral inability of the sinner, and setting forth the means, by which the Lord accomplishes the purposes of his everlasting love. In the valley of dry bones, to which Miss Graham has just alluded, the prophet was commanded to "call the things that be not, as though they were." The Almighty power of God gave effect to the feeble voice of his servant.² He fails not to manifest the same almighty power in the resurrection of souls under the ministration of his Gospel; while the sovereignty of his grace is not less apparent in "quickening whom he will."³

Perhaps, however, Miss Graham may be considered somewhat defective in *an exhibition of the free invitations of the Gospel*. Many exclusive writers⁴ deem it unnecessary to address the language of pleading love and urgent remonstrance, where the want of inclination opposes a moral barrier to its success. But this is to obscure the riches of the grace of God by the narrow and perverted reasoning of man. Our Lord's personal ministry was in no way restrained by his perfect knowledge of the eternal purpose or of human inability. Though the objects of electing love were individually known to him, yet his gracious offers were as general, as if no counsel had been fixed in the eternal mind, or as if he were unacquainted with its restricted object and end. Though he most decisively declared man's total inability to come to him irrespective of the sovereign application of Almighty power;⁵ yet, "his bands of love" were "the cords of a man"—suited to "draw" him as a rational and responsible creature.⁶ The freeness of Divine mercy—not the secret decree of the Divine will—was the ground and rule of his patient procedure. He spoke the glad tidings to the unbelieving Jews, "that they might be saved."⁷ He complains of them most tenderly, that "they would not come to him, that they might have life."⁸ He connected his declaration of the purpose of God with a full and faithful invitation to sinners.⁹ He offered himself indefinitely to large and mixed assemblies as the provision for the salvation of the whole world.¹⁰ He extended the commission of his Gospel "to every creature,"¹¹ and closed the special revelation of the

¹ Freeness of Grace, pp. 53—57.

² Ezek. xxxvii. 2—10.

³ John v. 21, 25, with Ephes. i. 19, 20.

⁴ Miss Graham, however, must not be confounded with writers of this class. If there was an omission in her statements, there was no defect in her system. Her private correspondence abounds with the most fervid appeals to the unconverted, and the most unrestricted offers of the Gospel. See the letters in Chapter v. adduced as illustrative of her "compassionate concern for the unconverted."

⁵ See John vi. 44, 65.

⁶ Hosea xi. 4.

⁷ John v. 34.

⁸ John v. 40. Compare Matt. xxiii. 37.

⁹ Ibid. vi. 37.

¹⁰ Ibid. vi. 50, 51; vii. 37. Compare Isaiah lv. 1, 2. Matt. xi. 28.

¹¹ Mark xvi. 15.

future history of the church, with the same widely-extended embrace of inestimable mercy.¹ Where, then, is the sinner that is excluded from the responsibility of believing the testimony? Or where is he that is shut out from the encouragement of its free and large invitations?

Turning from Miss Graham's writings to her correspondence, we find her views of the Gospel to be equally clear and encouraging.

The following letter gives a distinct view of the ground of our acceptance with God:—

‘February 15, 1828.

‘DEAREST ——. Join with me in admiring the mercy of our God. “For if, *when we were enemies*, we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, *much more*, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”² “If we confess our sins, God is”—not *merciful* and *compassionate*,—but “*faithful* and *just* to forgive us our sins.”³ For since “Christ once suffered, the just for the unjust”—since *He* “*bare our sins in his own body on the tree*”⁴—if we believe on him, and lay hold on his salvation, justice itself cannot but acquit us. It cannot be, that Jesus should lay down *His* life, and that then God should require *ours*. It cannot be, that, when Jesus has paid the dreadful debt to the very uttermost farthing, we should be called upon to pay it once again. No. As God is a *faithful* God, He must fulfil the promises He has made, that not one of all those who come to Him through Jesus, shall ever perish. As He is a just God, He will not punish us and our Surety too—will not demand a twice-told reckoning. If, indeed, the atonement of Jesus were not perfect; if He had not suffered *all*, not paid *all*, we might tremble. But Almighty Justice declared itself satisfied, when our Surety was released from the prison of the tomb, when he sat down on the right hand of God, and took possession in our name of the inheritance He had purchased for us; and therefore it is said, that He “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”⁵ By his death, He laid down the price of our salvation; by His rising again, He declared that the price was accepted—the salvation complete. And this seems to me the great display of God’s wisdom in the cross of Christ, that the *Just* should be able to justify the *ungodly* without deviating one tittle from His justice—“that He should be just, and (yet) the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”⁶ But we find these two things inseparably united

¹ Rev. xxii. 16, 17.

² Rom. v. 10.

³ 1 John i. 9.

⁴ 1 Peter iii. 18; ii. 24.

⁵ Rom. iv. 25.

⁶ *Ibid.* iii. 26. We extract an illustration of the subject from her Manuscript, equally beautiful and just. In defining the principle of analysis to be—taking to pieces a train of argument, and examining the soundness of its component parts, she gives the following Scriptural example.—“Christ crucified, the wisdom of God, and the power of God.” (1 Cor. i. 23, 24.) What an overwhelming multitude of reflections crowd upon the serious mind at the bare mention of these words! But in proving the doctrine to unbelievers, how many concurrent circumstances must be separately and distinctly unfolded! It is alleged to be incompatible both with “the wisdom and power of God,” that he should be constrained to glorify one of his attributes at the expense of another. We must there-

in Scripture—holiness and salvation, as I saw it well expressed in some little work I was reading the other day: ‘No salvation *by* works; and yet no salvation *without* works.’ “Christ hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins.”¹ If, then, we follow and obey him not as our Prince, He is as yet no Saviour to us. If He has not given us repentance, we must not suppose that He has given us remission. But dear —, let us bear in mind, that both are *gifts*. Repentance is as much a *gift*, and as little a merit as *pardon*. I fear I have been very tedious; but the subject has led me further than I intended. We are sinners seeking a common Saviour; and, therefore, I trust that nothing we can say of him can be wearisome.’

The practical view of this statement is more fully developed in one of her latest letters to the same correspondent:

‘September, 1830.

‘Far from thinking it presumption to write as you have done, my dear friend, I think we ought not to be ashamed of owning what God has done for our souls. We know that it is solely “by the grace of God”—His free, unmerited favor—that we “are what we are;” and that in our lips, and above all, in our lives, we are bound to show, that “the grace of God was not bestowed upon us in vain.”²

‘Dear —, it has indeed pleased God to “call us to His kingdom and glory;” let us (in His strength) “walk worthy of the high vocation wherewith we are called.” “Let us exhort one another daily while it is called to-day; let us provoke one another unto love and to good works;”³ and above all—let us pray for one another—and that fervently and unceasingly. We have need not only to pray, but to “*watch unto prayer*,”⁴ for it is only as long as we maintain this watchful spirit, that we can hope to enjoy any of the comforts of religion. Let me entreat you—not as one whose freedom from these sins gives her a right to exhort others—but as one who has herself felt by mournful experience what “an evil and bitter thing it is”⁵ to depart from the God of our salvation; as a backslider, whose backslidings have been healed by the inexpressible mercy of a long-suffering God—let me most earnestly and affectionately entreat you to guard against the least declension from holiness—the least relaxation in that close and humble walking

fore consider each attribute apart from the rest, and show how each is glorified in the doctrine of the cross. Each part of the argument must be unfolded. Each link of the wondrous chain must be distinctly separated. We may offer them successively to the unbeliever, and challenge the strictest scrutiny to detect a single break. If only one link be imperfect, the whole chain must give away. All the hopes which hang upon it must perish. But the more closely we examine it, the more complete will be our satisfaction. I have adduced this doctrine in illustration of my meaning, because I know of none which involves a greater number of considerations. In Maclaurin’s Sermon on the Glory of the Cross, we have a most perfect specimen of this kind of analysis.’

¹ Acts v. 31.

² 1 Cor. xv. 10.

³ Eph. iv. 1. Hebrews iii. 13; x. 24.

⁴ 1 Peter iv. 7.

⁵ Jeremiah ii. 19.

with God, which alone can keep you peaceful and happy. Works cannot justify us before God; but we are said to be justified by works in one part of Scripture¹—that is, they are the only evidence of our justification that we can offer to our fellow-creatures. “Ye shall know them by their fruits.”² And what are “the fruits of the Spirit?” Forgive me, if I record them here—the description is so lovely, that we cannot remind one another of it too often—“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”³ Let us examine ourselves by this, dearest —. Let us see whether we bring forth *this* fruit, and whether we “bring forth *much* fruit—*so shall we be His disciples.*”⁴ My course is perhaps almost ended. I have reason to hope that it will not be very long ere I enter into that rest, which Jesus has purchased for me with his blood. Oh, that I had walked more to his glory, “who loved me, and gave Himself for me!” But your course (as a Christian) is but lately begun, and may, if the Lord please, be continued for many years. Oh, then, let it be indeed “the path of the just, which is as the shining light, that shining more and more unto the perfect day.”⁵ “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in purity. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. Be clothed with humility;”⁶ for as you are of an humbled and “contrite spirit, and tremble at God’s word,” so will “the High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity,” delight to dwell in your heart, to bless you with his refreshing and sanctifying presence.⁷ And now, dearest —, “may the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God, your whole body, and soul and spirit, be preserved blameless unto the coming of Jesus Christ.”⁸ To Him may we with one heart and voice, give glory both now and for evermore! Amen.⁹

The following letter, however, carefully separates the fruit of faith from every ground of dependence. The application of the subject for Christian consolation will be interesting.

‘Stoke, Feb. 21, 1827.

‘The chapter you mention (Matthew xxv.) is particularly delightful, as holding out a lovely picture of the people of Christ. But let us mark, that it is not the action, but the motive, which meets with such high commendation. It is not said—Ye fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, &c., but “I was hungry, and ye gave *me* meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave *me* drink; inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, *ye did it unto me.*” And this appears to be the grand difference between Christians and worldly people. The Chris-

¹ James ii. 21, 22, 24.

⁴ John xv. 8.

⁶ 1 Tim. iv. 12. 1 John ii. 15.

⁸ 1 Thes. v. 23.

² Matthew vii. 16.

⁵ Proverbs iv. 18.

1 Peter v. 5.

³ Galatians v. 22—24.

⁷ Isaiah lxvi. 2; lvii. 15.

tian does everything *as unto Christ*—in His name, in His strength, and to His glory. The worldling may, and often does, out of natural benevolence or ostentation, feed the hungry; or clothe the naked; but he does it not unto Jesus, but to please himself, to gratify natural feeling, to appear well in the sight of others, to gain a stock of merit enough to buy heaven, or at least to help out what may be wanting in the merit of Christ. These are his best motives: Talk to him of doing good works; *because you are saved*, and not *that you may be saved*; and you are talking of a thing which never entered his narrow heart, and which will not enter it, till it is enlarged by the grace of Christ. But let us beg of God to give us this motive, and right actions will naturally follow. It will, as some one expresses it, ‘like the spring of a watch, soon set all the wheels of our souls a-going.’ I cannot leave this chapter without sharing with you the comfort I have derived from it in another point of view. Does Jesus say—“I was hungry, and ye gave me meat,” &c.? Is He then hungry, when we are hungry? Does He faint, when we are thirsty, and languish when we are “sick and in prison?” And think you, He will not much more sympathize with our spiritual necessities? When we hunger for the bread of life, and thirst for living water; when we are sensible that our guilty souls stand “naked” before him; when we feel ourselves “sick” of that worst disease, sin; and in bondage to Satan, that most hard master—will not He then sympathize with us? And His pity will not be a vain and empty pity. He will not only sympathize, but relieve. He will feed, and nourish, and clothe, and heal and deliver us. Nor will he be content with this. But the same pity He feels for us, He will teach us to feel for others; so that we shall be such characters as He describes the “blessed of the Father” to be. Only let us trust Him for all this, and continually importune him for it; for his promises are all addressed to those who trust, and ask, and seek, and knock.’

The freeness and fulness of the Gospel are delightfully applied, to counteract the subtle influence of self-righteousness.

‘September 28, 1825.

‘You tell me, my beloved friend, that you have lately suffered wordly thoughts to engross too much of your time, and that you have found little comfort in prayer. Will you let me tell you what seems to me to be the cause of this; at least as far as I can judge of my own experience?’

‘You need a more simple and entire dependence on what Christ has done for you, and will do in you; you want to be doing something yourself, when He has done all; you would repent and pray earnestly, and then you think Christ would forgive you. I do not know whether I am right with regard to your feelings; but this at least has sometimes been my own case; but in fact, my dear——, it was for sinners, who *cannot* repent, who *cannot* pray, that the Saviour came to die. Repentance is His gift—His *free* gift—as

well as pardon; and it is only when we are willing to come to Him—poor, empty, and miserable as we are—that He delights in “filling us with good things.” I think I have not clearly explained myself; but I will try to give you an instance of what I mean.

‘I used to be often doubting whether I was one of Christ’s people or not. Now this one text satisfied all my doubts,—“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”¹ From this it seems there is but one question—Am I willing to come to Christ? If so, then am I one of those whom “the Father hath given Him;” if so, then will He never, never cast me out; and if so, then is God the Father, then is God the Son, engaged by an immutable promise, by unchangeable faithfulness, to bring me—a feeble worm of the earth—a sinner by nature and practice—yes, even to bring me safe home to glory. Am I willing? Oh my dear friend, I doubt not your heart is answering to mine: Yes, Lord, thou knowest that I am willing to come unto thee. “To whom should I go?” for there is “none in heaven or in earth, that I desire beside thee!” Again, with regard to the love of the world,—that great enemy to the Christian life,—I used to think, how shall I overcome it? Now, I look simply to Jesus, who has said—“Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”² He has overcome it for us, and will overcome it in us. For how can we love that world, which crucified our Lord and Saviour? How can we give way to that “love of the world,” which will deprive us of “the love of the Father?”³ Believe me, my dear —, there is not a sin, however deeply rooted in the heart, from which we may not be delivered by simply looking to Jesus, and pleading with him his precious promises. To this end, “let the word of Christ dwell richly in us with all wisdom;” let us “hide his word in our hearts,” and we shall find it will preserve us from “sinning against him.”⁴ “The love of the world,” accompanied as it always must be by lukewarmness in heavenly things, is indeed a great sin, and will, as far as we indulge in it, be as a cloud between us and the Father; for, “know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?”⁵ But then we need not be discouraged; for though we never can overcome it in our own strength, we have a promise that the “strength of the Lord Jesus shall be made perfect in our weakness.”⁶ “Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.”⁷ Dost thou want grace every moment to keep thee from falling?—“My grace is sufficient for thee.” Wouldst thou have wisdom? “Christ is made unto us wisdom.” “God giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.”⁸ Wouldst thou have peace? There is “peace and joy for thee in believing.”⁹ Thy Saviour is “the Prince of Peace.”¹⁰ Wouldst thou be preserved unto the end? “The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and

¹ John vi. 37.

⁴ Col. iii. 16. Psalm cxix. 11.

⁷ John i. 16.

¹⁰ Isa. ix. 6.

² Ibid. xvi. 33.

⁵ James iv. 4.

⁸ 1 Cor. i. 30. James i. 5.

³ 1 John ii. 15.

⁶ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

⁹ Rxlv. 3.m^o.

keep you from evil.”¹ Finally, do we seek for direction in every step of our path through life? Let us feed on those precious promises in Isaiah xxx. 21. and xlvi. 17. Thus, my dear friend, we may go on “with joy, drawing water out of the wells of salvation;”² and we are then constrained to cry out with Jeremiah—“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.”³ I fear that I have already taken too much time upon this; but it has pleased God, in my afflictions, to make Christ, and the word of Christ, so unspeakably precious to me, that my heart will not rest, till I have called on my dear friend to live in consistency with her privileges as a child of God, and to “rejoice in the Lord always.”⁴

And again,

‘September 17, 1827.

‘I have read your letter again and again with deepest interest. I grieved to find, that you do not gain any sensible comfort in the path of religion. You seem to think yourself going backward, rather than forward. But may not this be, because you see daily more of the vanity and wickedness of your own heart, and of the wretchedness of your very best performances? If so, are you not making progress? And while perhaps in reality you are *less* conformed to the world, *less* bent upon earthly things than you were a few months ago; your more enlightened views of the spiritual nature of God’s law, and the holy strictness of its requirements, may make you see more worldliness and sin in everything you do, than you were capable of perceiving, when you first began the study of your own heart. For, believe me—the further we “come up from this wilderness, leaning upon our beloved,”⁵ the more clearly we shall see, that not one step can be taken in our own strength; and every time we begin to think we are a little stronger, and may venture to stir a few steps alone, we shall be left to stumble and fall, until he again upholds us with his hand. We want to be something in ourselves, to have something that we can call our own, something to look at, and to rest upon as such: when, alas! we are nothing, have nothing, but what comes to us from the fulness of Jesus. As long as we look into our own hearts for any source of comfort, we must inevitably be disappointed. If we look at “our righteousnesses, they are but as filthy rags;”⁶ “the covering is narrower than that a man can wrap himself in it.”⁷ But if we cast these filthy rags from us, and look to the righteousness of Jesus, then we have a spotless robe—an ample covering for our naked and defiled souls. I cannot help thinking, my beloved friend, that your sadness proceeds from thinking too much of yourself, and too little of Jesus. You brood upon your own sin and misery, till you forget “The Lord your righteousness.” You are deeply sensible of your

¹ 2 Thess. iii. 3.

² Isaiah xii. 3.

³ Jer. xv. 16.

⁴ Philip. iv. 4.

⁵ Canticles viii. 5.

⁶ Isaiah lxiv. 6.

⁷ Ibid. xxviii. 20.

own weakness, but dwell too little on the sweet assurance, that you "*can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth you.*"¹ You lament your own folly; but is not Jesus made wisdom to you?—your own insufficiency; but "in Jesus dwells" there not "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily?" and may not you be "complete in him?"² Yet let us not cease to look at ourselves to make us humble; but let us look at Jesus to make us happy; and when we look at him, let us remember, that he is *our* Jesus, our Saviour, and that he will make us *more* happy. Let me give you a text, which I have sometimes found to be a sovereign remedy against all those fears, which a view of our own sinfulness is apt to excite: "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe."³ Here is comfort; here is safety. My dear friend, I have as much sin and weakness and folly to lament, as you can possibly have; and if it does not make me as miserable as it does you, it is simply because, whenever I am frightened and tormented by the accusations of conscience, I "run into this strong tower, and am safe." You too are safe, for have you not taken refuge there? Why, then, will you not open your eyes, and behold how the "name of the Lord, as a strong tower," compasses you on every side, so that you are quite out of the reach of every enemy? Jesus is our "hiding-place and our shield."⁴ If we fear Satan, he will soon "bruise Satan under our feet." If we fear the world, Jesus "has overcome the world." If we fear the treachery of our own deceitful hearts, let us put those hearts into the hands of Jesus; he shall turn them "as the river of water, whithersoever he will." Nor is he only thus strong to defend us, but rich to supply our need. If we want repentance, Jesus is exalted to give repentance. If we want faith, "it is given us on the behalf of Christ to believe."⁵ If we want holiness, "Jesus is made of God sanctification unto us."⁶ If we want peace, "the peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."⁷ In short—let our sins, our fears, and wants be ever so great, they need not drive us to despair, as long as Jesus lives and "is able to save to the uttermost." *We are complete in him.* Well then might David say, "They that *know thy name* will put their trust in thee;"⁸ well might Solomon say—"Thy name is as ointment poured forth;"⁹ and Isaiah—"His name shall be called Wonderful."¹⁰ But, my dear friend, *we* have an interest in this precious name; *we* may draw near to the Father of mercies in this name, and *he will deny us nothing.*¹¹ Then shall we give way to gloomy doubts and forebodings any more? Alas! I know how little all these reflections weigh with us, unless the Spirit of God bring them home with light and power to our hearts. Even while I am talk-

¹ Philippians iv. 13.

⁴ Psalm cxix. 114.

⁷ Phil. iv. 7.

¹⁰ Isaiah ix. 6.

² Col. ii. 9, 10.

⁵ Phil. i. 29.

⁶ Psalmix. 10.

¹¹ John xvi. 23, 24.

³ Proverbs viii. 10.

⁶ 1 Cor. i. 31.

⁹ Can. i. 3.

ing to you, my own heart is so little affected, that I am ashamed to go on ; but I speak rather as I would feel, than as I do feel.'

The above statements of Divine truth will be generally admitted to be of a scriptural and decided character. Her exhibition of the humbling doctrines of the Gospel brings no occasion for despondency ; while it commends to the awakened sinner the simple glory of a free salvation. Nor does her view of gratuitous acceptance lose a particle of its evangelical clearness by the connected display of its fruitfulness. The man thoroughly humbled by the doctrines of the grace of God, will delight in holiness as the track of communion with his God, and the pathway to heaven ; while his sense of continued defilement will preserve him from self-righteousness, deepen his self-abasement, and establish his faith in the simplicity of Christ.

Her connected apprehensions of what are called the higher doctrines of the Gospel with the whole system, are well stated by the beloved brother, whose high privilege it was to attend her during her last illness.

'She had received'—he observes—'the Gospel as a dispensation of pure grace. She delighted to speak in a *holy manner* of God's electing love. She "knew her election,"¹ and rejoiced in a sense of her high privilege. The reception of this blessed doctrine produced in her soul, *deep humility, gratitude, and love*. She well knew, that it was God "who had made her to differ"² from a "world that lieth in wickedness;" and she could say from her heart,—"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake."³ She was so deeply convinced from the word of God, from all around her, and from her own heart, of the deep depravity of human nature, of the utter helplessness of man, to do, think, or say anything that is spiritually good, that she saw no other method, whereby a sinful creature could be saved, but from the combined offices of the Holy Trinity—from the election of the Father, the redemption of the Son, and the sanctification of the Spirit.'

A single extract from her publication will fully corroborate this testimony. The beauty of her language will justify the length of the quotation.

'Thus it is, that while the doctrine of predestination is death to those who weary themselves in presumptuous disputings and reasonings about it ; there always have been and will be a happy few, who, humbly and sincerely feeding upon it, receiving all that the Scripture tells them concerning it, and desiring to know no further, find it health and peace to their souls. It lays them very low at the feet of their Redeemer ; brings down the high swelling of their pride and self-esteem, pulls away from under them all those broken reeds upon which they had been used to lean, self-righteousness,

¹ Thess. i. 4.

² 1 Cor. iv. 7.

³ Psalm cxv. 1.

self-will, self-dependence; and leaves to them no one prop on which to lean for support. whilst "coming up out of this wilderness," but "the arm of their Beloved"—that everlasting arm which will surely conduct them to glory. When that arm becomes shortened that it cannot save, or weak that it cannot support; when the arm of Jesus fails and is weary; then they will begin to look around for some other stay; but not till then. Or when they can discover in themselves one single good thing which Jesus did not put there; one reason why he should visit them with such amazing love; then they will conclude that his love took its rise from theirs: not theirs from His. But they never will discover one such thing; so long as the Spirit of God illumines their heart, and brings to light its immense depravity and worthlessness. Therefore as God's love could not have been excited by anything in them, they believe it to be an eternal love: that they were called in time, because they were chosen from eternity; and that the name of Jesus is now engraved as a seal upon their hearts, because their names were written on his heart before ever the world was. And when their thoughts stretch forward to the end of this pilgrimage, and they rejoice in the view of the mansions prepared for them in their Father's house, the crown of that rejoicing is this—"We got not the land in possession by our own strength, neither did our own arm save us; but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, *because thou hadst a favor unto us.*"¹ "Thus they rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh;" for "God is the glory of their strength; and in his favor their horn is exalted."²

'I cannot pretend to meet the objections, or to refute the cavils commonly raised, when this doctrine of election is made the subject of discussion; for I did not learn it in the way of carnal reasonings, but by simply taking the Scriptures as I found them, and as the Spirit of God enabled me to receive them. If St. Paul, after descending on this subject, breaks off in an ecstasy of admiration, exclaiming—"How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"³—we need not wonder if our shallow understandings are incapable of fathoming, our limited capacities of comprehending, our low minds of reaching them. We must be satisfied with believing that it is even so, because so it seemed good in our Father's sight,⁴ whatever it may appear in ours. This reason, which appeared satisfactory to our Saviour, may surely satisfy us; or if not, he has vouchsafed an assurance, which may well serve to repress present inquiry into things too high for us—"What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."⁵

'That these things are so, I believe, because I find them among the "revealed things which belong to us and our children forever." How or why they are so, I desire not too closely to inquire, lest I should intrude into the "secret things, which belong unto the Lord

¹ Psalm xliv. 3.

⁴ Matt. xi. 29.

² Phil. iii. 3. Psalm lxxxix. 17.

⁵ John xiii. 7.

³ Rom. xi. 33.

our God."¹ O that he would give unto every one of us that humble and teachable spirit, with which a little ignorant child is content to receive his father's lessons, without rudely commenting upon his father's ways, or rashly intruding into his father's secrets! This one thing we know; and with this we may be satisfied; that "the Judge of all the earth cannot but do right."² But it were preposterous to expect that he should always do that which is right in our eyes, so long as our notions of right and wrong are so utterly confused and perverted as they have been ever since the fall. He himself tells us that "the Lord seeth not as man seeth:" and that "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."³ It cannot be, so long as "his ways are equal, and ours unequal,"⁴ that his righteous dealings should be in exact accordance with our unrighteous views and sentiments. Instead then of wearying ourselves with impotent attempts to bring down his will and counsel to the level of our ideas, our far wiser way will be to submit our thoughts and ideas to his will, assured that it is holy, just, and good.⁵ She then proceeds to defend the doctrine at some length, and with considerable ability, from the usual objections of charging God with injustice, and of encouraging licentiousness, arrogance, and dependency in man.

The Writer is glad to find that this large extent of quotation, with which he has indulged himself, has in some means been effectual to introduce Miss Graham's work from the comparative obscurity of an anonymous publication, into that more general acceptance, which in his own, and, he presumes he may add, in his reader's judgment, it well deserves. It would be too much to anticipate a universal concurrence in all her statements. Yet from the peculiar unction⁶ and richness of her theology, and its entire freedom from speculation and controversy, they cannot be read by the serious reader without spiritual profit. The more mysterious doctrines (as will be seen from the last quotation) are handled in a holy, practical spirit, eminently calculated to soften prejudice, to prostrate the soul in humble thankfulness, and to enlarge the Christian's joy in God. It is indeed one of the many painful results from the harsh, crude, and abstract statements too often given of these doctrines; that they have contributed unjustly to discredit the more sober Scriptural declarations, which, when cast, like Miss Graham's, into the mould of our Seventeenth Article, are justly pronounced by our Church to be 'full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons.'

On such deep and humbling subjects, the Writer would not presume to set up his judgment as the rule of faith for the Church. Yet he has felt a caution necessary for his own mind, which he ventures therefore to suggest to his brethren. Let us take care lest

¹ Deut. xxix. 29.

² Gen. xviii. 25.

³ 1 Sam. xvi. 7. Luke xvi. 15.

⁴ Ezek. xviii. 25.

⁵ Pp. 45—47.

⁶ The term is used according to Dr. Johnson's beautiful definition—'That which melts to devotion.'

the irreconcilableness of these doctrines with our apprehensions of the Divine character, rather than a defect of their Scriptural evidence, should influence our rejection of them. Is there no danger, lest a predisposing bias in the search for this evidence, should obscure that singleness of eye, which is the only medium for the reception of 'heavenly light?'¹ The admission of these doctrines, indeed, as the result of disputation or argument, could only issue in a fearful proportion of that "knowledge which puffeth up," combined with a total absence of the "love that edifieth."² But the child-like reception of them *as revealed in the Holy Scriptures*, will be, (as we have just hinted,) eminently fruitful in humiliation, love, privilege, and devotedness. After all, however, we must remember—"A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven."³ This sacred aphorism lays the whole substantial basis of the true faith of the Gospel; while the light reflected upon the steady course of Christian consistency,⁴ though it will not clear up every difficulty, will enlarge our discovery of the Divine Goodness to man, and assure to our minds the unchangeableness of God, as the ground of that "strong consolation," which "the heirs of promise" are fully warranted to enjoy.⁵

II. ON SUBJECTS OF THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION.

THE first question is closely connected with some of the subjects of the last Section. It states *her views of the consistency of conditional promises with a free salvation.*

'As to the promises'—Miss Graham observes—'I do not say that they are unconditional either; but I do say, that the conditions on which they depend are such as guilty man is altogether incapable of performing. I do say that Jesus as our *Surety*, has performed all these *for* us, and *by his Spirit* will perform them all *in* us. Through his perfect atonement we escape the threatenings; through his unspotted obedience we become "heirs of the promises"—heirs of eternal life. For if the blame of our sins has been imputed to *Him*, then has the merit of His righteousness been imputed to *us*. "If he has been made sin for us, then have we been made the righteousness of God in him."⁶ And because the promises are ours for his sake, therefore the conditions of them are worked in us by his free Spirit; "for it is not we who live the life of faith, but Christ that liveth in us."⁷

'One of the sweetest promises, upon which the mind of every Christian rests with unspeakable delight, runs thus: "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."⁸ Here is a *condition*, "Him that cometh;" and a *promise*—"I will not cast out." But who *are* those that come to Jesus? "All that the Father giveth

¹ Matthew vi. 22, 23.

⁴ *Ibid.* vii. 16, 17.

² 2 Cor. v. 21. Romans iv. 6; v. 19.

⁷ Galatians ii. 20. John xv. 4, 5.

² 1 Cor. viii. 1.

⁵ Heb. vi. 17. 18.

Galatians iii. 29.

³ John iii. 27.

⁸ John vi. 37.

me shall come to me." "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." "No man can come to me, except it were given to him of my Father."¹ How distinctly are we here told, that the same free mercy, which promises to receive us *when we come*, must be put forth to *make us come*; or *we never should come*! The promise will surely be fulfilled to all who obey the condition: but none *can* obey the condition, save those *to whom it is given*.'

'Every condition necessary to salvation,' she remarks, 'is fulfilled in us, not by any efforts of our own, but by our "receiving" continually "grace for grace out of the fulness of Jesus."' In confirmation of her argument, she adduces the Christian graces (repentance, faith, love,) as *required of us*, but *yet wrought in us*. Thus she concludes this discussion—'The great question, then, about the promises seems to be, not so much whether they are *conditional*, as whether God looks to *Christ*, or to *us*, for the *performance* of those conditions. If to *Christ*, the burden is laid upon "one that is *mighty*:" if to *us*, then we are undone: 'for the condition of man after the fall is such, that he *cannot turn and prepare himself*, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God: wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by *Christ preventing us*, that we may have a *good will, and working with us when we have that good will*."²

The statement is confessedly strong and uncompromising; yet it is, in the writer's apprehension, neither unguarded, unscriptural, or discouraging. It assumes *with our church* the scriptural point *not of the weakness but of the utter helplessness* of man.³ It connects the freeness of the Gospel with the sovereign purpose and Almighty grace of God.⁴ Thus man and God are each in his proper place; man in the dust—God on the throne. The humble and intelligent believer will acknowledge of every act of faith and obedience to the end of his course—"Thou also hast wrought all our works in us."⁵ Nor will he hesitate to trace all these works to the "*good pleasure*" of his God as the first cause.⁶

The opposite statement may be easily proved to be most discouraging. The free invitations of the Gospel are unconnected with an entire dependence upon Divine grace to enable the sinner to accept them. Conscious inability is therefore left without any power to act upon it. The sinner is either blinded in self-delusion, or hardened in despondency. On the other hand, his helplessness is taught to depend upon the sovereign pleasure of a God of love; and he "works out his salvation with fear and trembling" indeed, but with confident hope of perseverance.⁷

¹ John. vi. 37, 44, 65.

² Art. X. Freeness of Grace, pp. 28—30, 33—36, 37.

³ See Article X, and the multiplied testimonies from her Collects and other parts of our Evangelical services. Compare John xv. 5. Ephesians ii. 1.

⁴ Compare John vi. 37, with 44, 65.

⁵ Isaiah xxvi. 12.

⁶ Philipians ii. 13.

⁷ Ibid. ii. 12, 13.

The unscriptural use of the term *condition* with many theologians—as if man could of himself perform the work of his salvation—has brought it into unmerited disrepute. Yet in Miss Graham's view, conditional promises ultimately resolve themselves into absolute unconditional love. The duties of Christian obedience—the divinely appointed means of enjoying the promises—do not depend upon anything to be fulfilled by us. They constitute a part of the engagements of the evangelical covenant, by which the Lord fulfils the demands of his law, by the Almighty power of his grace.¹ Miss Graham with many excellent men would altogether abolish the use of the term, at least as applied to us. But it has been allowed by many of our most orthodox divines,² whose statements cannot justly be accused of infringing upon the freeness of the Gospel. It would be difficult to substitute any other theological term, that would express the sense of many important declarations³ of Scripture with equal precision and appropriateness. Let it be understood to imply—not what is meritorious, but what is necessary to the economy of the Gospel—not an efficient cause, but an indispensable requisite. Is it not then needless scrupulosity to exchange a convenient term of explication for feeble circumlocution? And may there not be some danger, lest in our anxiety to preserve the freeness of scriptural statement, we unconsciously become fettered in the bonds of human systems?

Her letter upon the nature and degree of explicit faith necessary for acceptance with God is highly interesting.

‘The question you propose about prayer, does not appear to me to admit of a doubt. ‘Ought there not to be in every prayer a reference to the intercession of Christ? Will the earnestness and sincerity of a prayer avail without it?’ Doubtless, my dearest friend, there ought to be this reference: nor can a believer in Jesus imagine a prayer without it. But when an unbeliever first begins to long after the knowledge of God, the intercession of Christ may be a part of this knowledge, respecting which he is in utter darkness. Shall the earnest and sincere petition which he offers under such circumstances be disregarded? Is not the intercession of Christ going on for him as surely as if he knew of it; and is not this poor ignorant prayer the first-fruits of this intercession? And will not the Father accept it for the sake of his beloved Son, though the sinner as yet knows not how to offer it in his name? Certain I am, that the person who thus begins to seek after the Lord with his whole heart, will ere long have Jesus revealed in his soul; and then he will seek in the name of Jesus. The most signal answer I ever received to prayer, was at a time, when I was so bewildered in the labyrinth of infidelity, that I actually should have feared to have been guilty of blasphemy, had I prayed in the name of Jesus.

¹ Hebrews viii. 10. Thus in Matthew vi. 14, 15, by his law he requires a forgiving temper; by his grace he imparts it.

² Calvin, Owen, &c.

³ Such as Matthew vi. 14, 15. Luke xiii. 3, 5. Col. i. 21—23. Heb. iii. 6, 14.

In sincerity and earnestness I prayed to be taught whether Jesus Christ was an impostor or not; and for the sake of that precious Saviour, whom I thus insultingly doubted, my prayer was answered.¹

‘But our experience is of little value, unless it agrees with Scripture. I think the Bible is very clear upon this head, and therefore I venture to speak so confidently. I will mention two or three texts: “*He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*”² Is not this a description of the degree of faith and knowledge, which is necessary before a person can come and pray to God in an acceptable manner? And is not this the sum of it, that he must believe that there is a God, and that, if he diligently seeks this God, he shall be rewarded by finding the object of his search? There is not a word about—“*He that cometh to God must believe and pray through the intercession of Christ;*” though no doubt the person who believes so far as is mentioned in the text, will soon believe God in Christ, as he is revealed in the Gospel. So then, if a Pagan or Mahomedan in the darkest corner of the earth, or an infidel in this country, were to begin to seek God diligently, from the mere “*belief that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,*” upon the warrant of this text I should have no doubt of his acceptance.³ Again, “*If any man will (or wishes to) do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*”⁴ Here is the case supposed of a man, who, so far from praying in the name of Jesus, is not yet convinced whether his doctrines are divine, or whether he is a mere pretender, “*speaking of himself.*” What then is the preparation required? *He wishes to do the will of God.* He would gladly worship God aright, and submit to his will in all things. Yet he cannot pray *at first* with any reference to the intercession of Jesus. For he would think it sinful to do so, as long as he knows not “*whether the doctrine be of God, or whether Jesus Christ spake of himself.*” Yet this man—we have the word of Jesus for it—“*shall know of*

¹ See her own interesting description of this state of mind, chap ii.

² Hebrews xi. 6.

³ This text may, doubtless, be accommodated for intelligent and warranted encouragement in the case here presented to us. Yet it may be questioned whether Miss Graham's exposition includes the whole substance of the Apostle's mind. The faith of Cain in bringing his offering probably admitted the naked belief of the existence of God, and of his bounty to those that inquired after him. The Apostle's definition however stands in immediate connection with the faith of Abel and Enoch, (ver. 4, 5,) which implied access to God, and communion with him through an acceptable medium. Indeed the true faith in God's existence seems necessarily to suppose some relation to him. See Gen. xvii. 1. Exod. iii. 14. The very expectation of reward to sinners deserving condemnation, must, in a righteous government, be grounded upon some apprehension, however obscure, of a way of favorable acceptance. The desire and act of seeking also supposes some rule to direct our path and warrant our hope—a rule founded upon some new relation between God and his creatures, by which merited judgment is averted, and “*mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*”

⁴ John vii. 17. Doddridge remarks on Acts x. 34, 35, a somewhat parallel text—“*I think this text proves, that God would sooner send an angel to direct pious and upright persons to the knowledge of the Gospel, than suffer them to perish by ignorance of it.*”

the doctrine." Consider also the free and general promise of Christ, that "our heavenly Father will give the Holy Ghost to them that ask him."¹ Suppose yourself to have been in the state of mind of the text just mentioned, and to have heard this gracious promise. Would you have any thought of any intercession—of anything *beyond asking*? And you would probably have asked—"O my heavenly Father, give thy Spirit to teach me whether this man is sent by thee, or whether he speaks of himself?" Suppose for a moment (God forbid that any one should suppose it in reality!) that, after having offered this prayer sincerely, earnestly, perseveringly, you were at last suffered to perish for lack of knowledge; that the Holy Spirit for which you asked was not given, *because you asked it not*, (and how could you?) *in the name of Jesus*, the promise would seem to carry with it a want of sincerity, as having a condition attached to it, which was concealed from you, and *which the very nature of your petition incapacitated you from performing*, until further knowledge was given. I believe, that, when Christ said—"Ask, and it shall be given you,"² he meant what he said, in the *literal* sense of the word.

'It is remarkable, that asking in the name of Christ, was a doctrine not revealed to the disciples, till shortly before his death, though they must often have prayed before, and that with acceptance. The Lord's Prayer also contains no *express* reference to this doctrine, though doubtless every Christian *in his heart*, offers it in the one name, through which he looks for acceptance. Let us take the text above mentioned, to an assembly of Indians. Let us say to them—"You know not what to think of our doctrine concerning Jesus. You would take him for your Lord and your God, if you were sure that all we say about him is true. We will tell you how to find this out. There is a promise in the book, out of which we preach to you, that God "will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." The Holy Spirit is given to teach you about Jesus. If you will ask for this teaching, you shall have it; and then you shall know what to think of our doctrine.' They ask. In the name of Jesus they cannot ask. For the very point in question, the very thing which they ask God to teach them is, whether the name of Jesus is of any avail or not. They are impelled to ask by a "belief that there is a God, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Will the promise be made good to them or not? Or will this failing to pray in a manner in which they do not believe (that is—to act contrary to the reason, which God himself has lighted up within them) annul the engagement, by which God has bound himself, that all that ask should have? Oh! no. This is prayer; and it is praying with precisely that degree of "faith, without which it is impossible to please God." "To every one that hath thus much shall be given and he shall have abundance"³—he shall be rich in faith. And this is as true to my mind,

¹ Luke xi. 13.² Ibid. v. 9.³ Matthew xxv. 29.

as clear as any of the promises of God can be. You say—'Must faith be acting at the time?' I think the *degree* of faith mentioned in Heb. xi. 6, must. Yet even this, we know, may be a trembling faith, such as—"If thou canst do anything—Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief."¹ But "the day of small things,"² the first prayers of a hitherto unbelieving sinner have something in them unspeakably interesting. And it is so delightful to feel, that the very least of the "small things" comes from God, and implies pardon and heaven, and all those great things, which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,"³ that we cannot dwell upon them without transport. This is that "faith, which is as a grain of mustard-seed."⁴ Wrapped within its minute, dry, and unsightly husk is the embryo of the future tree, which shall expand and "flourish in the courts of our God." Oh! what a God of wonders! As we cannot look into the hearts of others, it is hard to know when the prayer is earnest and sincere. But if we could discern this, we might look at such a prayer with the same confident assurance that showers of blessings would follow it, as Elijah knew that there would be "abundance of rain," though there was nothing to be seen but a little cloud like a man's hand.⁵

This letter involves a question of much interest and no small difficulty. Miss Graham's sympathy with the case supposed enabled her to fix a conscious grasp upon the subject, and to speak directly to the point with much force and clearness. The instance of the penitent Ninevites,⁶ *ignorant of the medium of acceptance*, might have been added to her Scripture illustrations of the argument. And we can scarcely doubt that the cry to a Supreme Being—'Eus entium, miserere mei'⁷—"seeking the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him"⁸—may have proved the first dawn of light and love to some awakened consciences in a benighted world.

No other way to God than by Christ⁹ is here supposed, though an *unconscious* approach through him is admitted. For ourselves, however, who have been made acquainted with his precious name, no obligation is more important, no privilege more delightful, than the constant dependence upon it in every step of access to God. It covers all guilt, defilement, ignorance, and infirmities. It assures our confidence in the presence of a God of inflexible justice and unspotted holiness. Our persons and services, in themselves most unsuited to his awful majesty, are presented through this medium, clothed with Divine beauty, and commended in his sight as "a sweet-smelling savor." A clear knowledge of the person of Christ is therefore necessary as the basis of Christian confidence. The exercise of this confidence will be—not to apprehend him *separately*

¹ Mark ix. 22, 24.

⁴ Matt. xvii. 20.

⁷ Author of Being, "have pity;" or perhaps—"have mercy on me"—coming in the character of a sinner.

⁸ Acts xvii. 37.

² Zech. iv. 10.

⁵ 1 Kings xviii. 44.

³ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

⁶ Jonah iii.

⁹ John xiv. 6.

either as God or man, but to make his *entire person* the object of our trust. This intelligent and spiritual worship is as superior to mere external service, as the blood of the Son of God, by which we are brought into the capacity for it, is to the vile and corruptible things of earth.

The question under consideration, however, requires a wise mixture of decision and forbearance to determine its precise limits. While insisting upon the importance of a clear apprehension of Divine truth, we would present the full Scriptural encouragement to souls emerging out of darkness with a simple desire to know the light; seeking the truth, yet knowing not where to find it. Let them wait in the twilight for the dawning day, humbly, prayerfully, earnestly. Sincerity in the diligent and persevering habit of faith will not be left in darkness. On the other hand, it must be remembered, that the influence of the Holy Spirit, needful for every act of faith and prayer, stands in ordinary conjunction with revealed truth.¹ Let us beware, therefore, lest by broad statements we lose sight of the great fundamentals of the Gospel, and forget that "there is none other name than Christ under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," and that "life eternal" consists in the knowledge of Him.² Let us also carefully connect the general promises of the early dispensation of the Gospel with the more full and clear light subsequently vouchsafed. The direction to which Miss Graham refers—"Ask, seek, and knock"—must ever be linked with the name of Christ. His name is our only warrant to "ask." Himself is the only way to "seek:" the only door at which we can "knock" with any well-grounded hope of acceptance.³ In the neglect of this theology, we should attempt to open a way to heaven without "entering in by the door." We should admit the unscriptural supposition of pleasing God "without faith."⁴ We should endeavor to maintain our complete acceptance with God without the continual application of "the blood of sprinkling."⁵ 'Take heed'—said the excellent Dr. Owen—"lest, while we endeavor to invent new ways to heaven for others, by so doing we lose the true way ourselves."⁶

Miss Graham's discussion of the subject, in connection with the experience of the intelligent Christian, is most satisfactory and edifying.

'I think I now quite understand you about prayer. My reason for speaking of the beginnings only of prayer was, that I thought no confirmed Christian could possibly pray without a reference to the mediation of Christ Jesus. But your observation, that we may pray without *immediately referring to it*, or even thinking *directly of it*, is very just, as in the case you mention of ejaculatory prayer. But I would ask you, my dearest friend, is it not an understood

¹ See Gal. iii. 2.

² Acts iv. 12. John xvii. 3. 1 John v. 20.

³ Matt. vii. 7, 8, with John xvi. 23, 24; xiv. 6; x. 9.

⁵ Heb. x. 19 -22; xii. 24.

⁴ Heb. xi. 6.

⁶ Display of Arminianism, chap. xi.

matter between us and our heavenly Father, that we are to have all things in the name of Jesus? Would we, *if we could*, receive even the least of our blessings through any other medium? Is it not the very joy of our hearts to have everything, and do everything through Christ; to believe that the Father loves us for his sake; accepts us in him; hears our prayers, not because they are ours, but because he offers them for us? And is this fixed, settled, deep-rooted feeling less, when in ejaculatory prayer there is no *immediate* reference to his mediation, than in our larger devotions, when we stop to make out our title more fully, and to dwell upon it more largely? It is delightful and profitable to do this; but yet I think the intention of our hearts is the same in both cases. If you were asked after one of these short prayers—‘How do you expect or wish to be heard?’ would you not reply—‘In the only name of my Beloved!’ And would not the heaven of heavens seem less desirable of attainment, if by any possibility we could possess it in our own name, instead of the security of Jesus having entered before us and for us? I hope I am not wrong, and I am sure I would not object to repeating as often as possible to ourselves and to others our entire reliance upon his name. But I think, that when his mediation has become the very life and food of our souls, we need not torment ourselves with the fear, that such or such a prayer will not be answered, because I did not think of making formal mention of the ground on which I asked. Let me rather say—‘God knows that I would not, if I might, have it answered in any other way. He knows what I mean and constantly desire; and, if through infirmity, I may have expressed myself amiss or deficiently, infinite love will not misunderstand me.’ If you think I have taken a wrong view, tell me, my dear friend. But I am confirmed in it by this circumstance. When I am in a truly spiritual state, the mediation of Christ is (as it were) so worked up into my being, that I am often (except in stated prayers) not conscious of a direct reference to it at one time more than at another. Yet I think my mind never loses the idea. It is perpetually resting upon this sure anchor of hope. But when I am in a cold and careless state, (as at the present time) I lean upon it with an unstable faith. I am therefore much more often conscious of a *direct* reference to it. The shortest of my prayers have a sort of formality about them, from the cold repeated reference of the name of my Saviour. I do not know whether this is your case. I had rather have the thing so constantly in my heart, that I scarcely stop explicitly to allude to it, than lose the consciousness of it so often (as I now do) that I am obliged to remind myself of it, in order to plead it with God. But I think that in all *sincere* ejaculations there is an inward, though perhaps almost unconscious, feeling of repose and delight in his name, through which alone we desire to have acceptance with the Father. I fear I have not expressed my meaning intelligibly. I have sent, as you desired, my thoughts without reserve; though I know too little of the spirit

and power of prayer to qualify me to give my sentiments on so important a subject.'

The following letter *on Prayer to the Holy Spirit*, evinces much thought and spirituality.

'I feel very incompetent to give you any opinion on the point you mention about the Holy Spirit. Yet I have no doubt whatever in my own mind, that it is both right and desirable to pray to Him separately and distinctly. I should be very much afraid, that the contrary opinion would gradually tend to undermine our faith in the Personality of the Holy Spirit; unless indeed it is meant by this, that we are to pray to the Triune God only, and not either to the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, considered as separate persons. I have no doubt, as you say, that when we pray to the Father, we do worship this Trinity in Unity; and perhaps this is the most proper way of addressing our usual petitions. But it appears to me, that separate addresses are *permitted*, if not *sanctioned* in Scripture. And what I would earnestly contend for, (but that I fear I may be meddling "with things too high for me,") is this—If the Father and the Son may be separately addressed; then, not to allow of a separate address to the Spirit, is to rob him in some measure of his equal glory, and to do away with his Personality. I do not at this moment recollect any *direct instances* of prayer to the Holy Ghost in the Bible, though I think that there are many in which he would appear to be the person addressed. But if prayer comprehend adoration and thanksgiving, we often address him separately in the Liturgy, when we say—'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost,'—a form of words, in which we imitate the Seraphim before the Throne, who cry—'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.'¹ The same separate act of worship is surely implied when the four beasts, who rest not day and night, adore the Almighty, saying—"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."² Jesus commanded to "baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."³ Here again a separate act of worship seems to be implied. By baptizing in the name of each Person of the Holy Trinity, distinctly and separately repeated, I cannot but understand, that we *separately invoke each of them* to perform their covenanted part in the redemption of the baptized person. But I think, that it may at once decide the question, that we are said to be "the temple of the Holy Ghost;"⁴ and why he should come and dwell in this temple, except to receive our acts of worship, I do not see. Besides, all his offices invite us to pray to him. He is our Comforter;⁵ and this warrants us to ask him for comfort. It is his work to "shed abroad the love of God in our hearts;" to cause us to "abound in hope;" and to "take of Christ's and show to us."⁶ But surely "for

¹ Isaiah vi. 3.

² Rev. iv. 8.

³ Matt. xxviii. 19.

⁴ 1 Cor. iii. 16; vi. 19.

⁵ John xiv. 16.

⁶ Rom. v. 5; xv. 13. John xvi. 14, 15.

all these things he will be inquired of by us, to do them for us."¹ I had almost forgotten to mention that beautiful prayer, Numbers vi. 24—26, which I have always considered as a separate invocation of the Persons of the Sacred Trinity. May "the fellowship of the Holy Ghost" be with us! and may he fulfil his sacred office in teaching us what to pray for, and how to pray!

This question has exercised the minds of many sincere Christians. Perhaps an endeavor to present it in its full Scriptural light will not be unacceptable. The exclusive claim of the only true God to the worship of his creatures is one of the first principles of right reason and of religion. Upon this eternal and unchangeable ground our Lord denied to Satan the worship which he demanded of him.² We may remark, therefore, *upon the general subject*, that the proofs of the Personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit are so decisive, (though obviously this is not the place for their production,) that only scrupulosity of mind and judgment could restrain us from giving the honor of Divine worship from the want of a more explicit revelation. *The Divine nature—not the distinct Personality*—is the proper and necessary ground of worship. Each person therefore in the sacred Trinity possesses equal and unalienable claims—*not as a Person, but as God*—to the trust, love, subjection, invocation, and every form and act of worship from the creatures of God. The Holy Spirit, therefore, 'with the Father and the Son, together is worshipped and glorified.'³

As to the detail of the question, the worship of heaven, as Miss Graham observes, appears to be given to him. At least, he is never mentioned among the universal chorus of worshippers; which (*considering his Personality*) is some negative testimony on this point. He is represented as "proceeding out of the throne," being not only "before," but in the "midst of the throne;" his "seven eyes" marking his omniscience: his sevenfold influence, his divine perfections.⁴ 'The thrice-repeated invocation of the heavenly host, while it proves his distinct Personality in the undivided Trinity, evidently includes his worship. "The Lord *sitting upon his throne*," and *worshipped* with most solemn and impressive adoration, *sent by his own authority*, and *spoke by his own mouth*, that commission to the Prophet, which an Apostle declares to have been delivered to him *by the Holy Ghost*.'⁵

The worship of earth commences at the visible entrance into the Church of God. The very first act of Christian worship in the administration of baptism is not only, as Miss Graham observes, a separate *invocation* of the Holy Spirit, but also a *dedication* of the baptized person to his service.⁶ For as the administration of this

¹ Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

² Matt. iv. 9, 10, with Luke iv. 6, 7. Comp. Ps. xlv. 11.

³ Nicene Creed.

⁴ Rev. xxii. 1; iv. 5. v. 6.

⁵ Compare Isaiah vi. 1—3, 8—10, with Acts xxviii. 25.

⁶ Matthew xxviii. 19. The phrase "*baptized unto Moses*," (1 Cor. x. 2.) includes this idea. The people were, as by baptism, consecrated unto God under the conduct and instruction of his servant Moses.

seal of the covenant in the name of the Holy Ghost is a direct acknowledgment of this Divine Person as conjointly with the Father and the Son, our covenant God; so it necessarily implies also the reciprocal obligations of faith, obedience, and worship. "The communion" or "fellowship of the Spirit" (one of the most enlivening privileges of the Gospel) must also, like the "fellowship with the Father and the Son,"¹ be maintained by prayer in the large acceptation of the term. For how else, but in worship, can a creature hold communion with his God? This worship St. John scrupled not to give to the Holy Spirit, in supplicating from him, conjointly with the Father and the Son, a large supply of spiritual blessings upon the Church of God.²

In *Christian experience*, the offices of the Holy Spirit—as Miss Graham remarks—especially *when connected with his Divine Personality*, naturally imply supplication. In reference to one of these offices, Scripture parallelism, together with the marked distinction of the Sacred Persons, exhibits St. Paul *probably* on more than one occasion invoking the Holy Spirit as the "God that heareth prayer."³ Nor indeed can we conceive of his presence in us as his temple, without all the devotional exercises of reverence and praise for his condescending love.

The *part which the Holy Spirit maintains in the administration of the Church*, shows that his claim to immediate worship was fully acknowledged. It was *after a day of public and special supplication*, that He directed by His own authority the consecration of ministers to His immediate service, and sent them forth to their work.⁴ To whom, then, we may ask, had the prayers of the Church been specially addressed, but to Himself, who was manifestly the object, as well as the author, of their consecration? And to whom did the worship connected with this solemn service belong, but to Him, who was the direct source and fountain of it? We need again only advert to his acknowledged power in the ordination of the ministers of the Church,⁵ and to the exercise of his sovereignty in the appointment and restraint of their several spheres of labor,⁶ and in the distribution of his gifts,⁷ as a scriptural warrant for the direct and distinct mode of address to Him employed in the Consecration services of our Church.

The Christian investigator of the early Ecclesiastical Records will observe with delight this Divine worship fully pervading the rituals of the Primitive churches.⁸ Our own Church, closely fol-

¹ 2 Cor. xiii. 14. Phil. ii. 1, with 1 John i. 3.

² Rev. i. 4, 5. "The seven Spirits," placed in this invocation *before Christ*, could not be the holy angels; whose name and inheritance are infinitely below him, and whose conscious unworthiness in two recorded instances refused the proffered worship of an apostle. Rev. xix. 10; xxii. 8, 9.

³ Compare 2 Thes. iii. 5, with Rom. v. 5. See also the same apparent distinction of persons marked 1 Thes. iii. 12, 13.

⁴ Acts xiii. 2, 4.

⁵ Acts xx. 28.

⁶ Acts xx. 22; xvi. 6, 7.

⁷ 1 Cor. xii. 4, 7—11.

⁸ Hurrion's valuable Sermons on the Divinity of the Holy Spirit, and Dr. Berriman's

lowing her sacred exemplar, has not confined this adoration of the Holy Spirit to her more exclusive Ministerial services. How often has the introduction of it into her Litany elevated the faith, and refreshed the spirits of her sincere worshippers! The frequent repetition of the doxology in her Liturgical exercises, is in the true spirit of the heavenly worship; and it may be a matter of just surprise, that any who have constantly and joyfully united in this public ascription of praise to the blessed Spirit, as well as in many of our congregational hymns to a similar purport, should be exercised with scruples as to the Scriptural ground of the private duty and privilege of prayer to the same divine person.

Miss Graham considered, and with some justice, that many Christians are defective in rendering due and equal honor to the Holy Spirit. Her own views of his personality were remarkably clear. 'I feel'—said she on one occasion—'*the love of the Spirit,*'¹ as distinct from the manifestation of *the love of Christ* to my soul. Is this wrong? Then she added—'I think I can account for the feeling; as I have made it a matter of especial prayer, that I might have clearer views of the Holy Spirit.' She was accustomed (as we have already seen²) to address Him in direct, and probably fre-

and Waterland's Sermons on the Trinitarian Controversy, give a condensed and satisfactory body of evidence on this subject.

¹ Romans xv. 30.

² See her Prayer before Study, pp. 22, 21. The writer cannot forbear to transcribe a few specimens of the Spirit of supplication in a full, self-abasing, pleading, and enlarged address to this Divine Person from the heart and pen of holy Mr. Baxter. "Unto thee, the Eternal Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, the Communicative Love, who condescendeth to make perfect the elect of God, do I deliver up this dark, imperfect soul, to be further renewed, confirmed, and perfected, according to the Holy Covenant. Refuse not to bless it with thine indwelling and operations; quicken it with thy life; irradiate it with thy light; sanctify it by thy love; actuate it purely, powerfully, and constantly by thy holy motions. And though the way of this thy sacred influence be beyond the reach of human apprehensions, yet let me know the reality and saving power of it by the happy effects. Thou art more to souls than souls to bodies, than light to eyes. Oh leave not my soul as a corpse destitute of thy life; nor its eyes as useless, destitute of thy light; nor leave it a senseless block without thy motion. Alas! I feel, I daily feel that I am dead to all good, and all that is good is dead to me, if thou be not the life of all. Teachings and reproofs, mercies and corrections, yea, the Gospel itself, and all the liveliest books and sermons, are dead to me, because I am dead to them. Yea, God is as no God to me, and Heaven as no heaven, and Christ as no Christ, and the clearest evidences of Scripture verity are as no proofs at all, if thou represent them not with light and power to my soul. O thou that hast begun, and given me those heavenly intimations and desires which flesh and blood could never give me, suffer not my folly to quench these sparks, nor this brutish flesh to prevail against thee, nor the powers of hell to stifle and kill such a heavenly seed. O pardon that folly and wilfulness, which have too often, too obdurately, and too unthankfully striven against thy grace, and depart not from my unkind and sinful soul. I remember with grief and shame, how I wilfully bore down thy motions; punish it not with desertion, and give me not over to myself; Art thou not in covenant with me, as my Sanctifier, and Confirmer, and Comforter? I never undertook to do these things for myself; but I consent that thou shouldst work them on me, as thou art the agent and advocate of Jesus my Lord. O plead his cause effectually in my soul against the suggestions of Satan and my unbelief; and finish his healing, saving work; and let not the flesh and world prevail. Be in me the resident witness of my Lord, the Author of my prayers, the Spirit of adoption, the seal of God, and the earnest of mine inheritance. Let not my nights be so long, nor my days so short, nor sin eclipse those beams, which have often illuminated my soul. Without thee, books are senseless scrawls, studies are dreams, learning is a glow-worm, and wit is but wantonness, impertinence, and

quent supplication. The spiritual life indeed of the Christian is much employed in His reverential service. As "the sin against the Holy Ghost" (whatever that might be) included a wilful rejection of his faith, honor, and worship; so does every sin of "grieving" our Divine Comforter, and "resisting" his holy influence, partake, according to its measure, of the same character.¹ The antecedent obligation is therefore sufficiently obvious. The being against whom sin is committed, must be the worthy object of religious honor and service. All the exercises therefore of contrition and self-abasement on account of sin, are our humiliating but ready acknowledgments of the claim of the Holy Spirit to our dutiful obedience and worship. Perhaps the circumstance of our worship being the effect of his own sacred influence and teaching, may account for some want of distinctness in setting forth the obligation. But his Divine Person and offices necessarily imply our equal dependence upon his power and love: and the full and frequent confession of his claim will result in a large supply of his heavenly grace, strength, and consolation.

Should some of the minor particles of illustration be thought to possess little or no positive weight, they may yet derive force and clearness from their connection with more decisive grounds of evidence. From the main points, however, and from the whole view of the question, sufficient warrant may be deduced to satisfy perplexed and unsettled inquirers, and to quicken even the most intelligent servant of God to a more habitual acknowledgment of his duty, and enjoyment of his privilege in communion with the Holy Ghost. If a more explicit testimony still be demanded, we must recur to first principles, never more valuable than on these subjects. "*It is written.*" What is written is sufficient. What is withheld is best withheld. Man would be "wise above what is written." Had more been revealed, more would still have been desired; and the appetite for what is beyond human research would have been more excited, and not only without practical benefit, but to the great detriment of Scriptural knowledge. Enough is given both in substance and clearness to direct and encourage our supplications to the Divine Spirit for a full supply of his heavenly influence. But in this and every other approach to the doctrine of the Trinity, many questions must arise, and must remain unanswered. All that belongs

folly. Transcribe those secret precepts on my heart, which by thy dictates and inspirations are recorded in thy holy word. I refuse not thy help for tears and groans; but oh! "shed abroad that love upon my heart," which may keep it in a continual life of love. And teach me the work which I must do in heaven. Refresh my soul with the delights of holiness, and the joys which arise from the believing hopes of the everlasting joys. Exercise my heart and tongue in the holy praises of my Lord. Strengthen me in sufferings; and conquer the terrors of death and hell. Make me the more heavenly, by how much faster am I hastening to heaven; and let my last thoughts, words, and works on earth be likeliest to those, which shall be my first in the state of glorious immortality, where the kingdom is delivered up to the Father, and God will forever be All, and in All: of whom, and through him, and to whom are all things. To whom be glory forever. Amen.—Reasons for Christian Religion, Part ii. chap. xii. pp. 461—463.

¹ Comp. Matt. xii. 32. Eph. iv. 30. Acts vii. 51; v. 4.

to the inner sanctuary of the essence of the ever-blessed Triune God, is equally above conception and expression. The Scriptures inform us of his nature, but they do not reason about it. A divinely guarded and sacred veil covers him from our view. And much thought upon this deep subject of Deity—*irrespective of, and beyond, the sacred boundaries*—either involves us in the labyrinth of metaphysics, or sinks us into the gross, low, and familiar views of an opposite school. Our inquiries into this subject must be conducted with the deepest caution and the most profound humility. All that belongs to God's own revelation of himself must be received with unfeigned submission and contentment. To seek for "access through Christ by the Spirit unto the Father,"¹ is the rubric for Christian worship; and in a strict attention to this Scriptural directory, every act, thought, and desire of prayer will become a means of communion with each of the Sacred Persons in the Divine essence, "without difference or inequality." At the same time, as our minds are drawn to a separate contemplation of them (especially as seeking those blessings which belong to their respective offices in the economy of grace) an immediate address to either of them is fully warranted; always however remembering, that, whichever person be the object of worship, the mediation of Christ is the only way of access, the only plea for acceptance.

Adverting now to topics of more general interest, we transcribe from Miss Graham's Manuscript a few remarks *upon the subject of Infidelity*, as a fearful characteristic of the present day. They will be found to possess the usual marks of her sound, reflecting, Christian mind. Speaking of the importance of mathematical study as furnishing armor and discipline suitable to the present crisis,² she remarks—

'Intelligent Christians are especially called upon to set themselves in strong array against the gathering forces of infidelity. This last enemy of Christianity is filling up his ranks from all classes of the community. The active diligence of his malignity naturally reminds us of the prediction—"The devil is come down to you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."³

The deceitful and superficial character of the arguments employed by the great adversary is well exposed. 'They generally consist,' she observes, 'of a confused mass of objections, apparently formidable from their very indistinctness. Like objects seen through a fog, the superficial observer supposes them to be larger than they really are. But let us disentangle the artful confusion of words and ideas. Let us set apart each argument for separate and minute scrutiny. Let us analyze the boasted reasonings of the infidel philosophy. We shall find that they may be classed under two heads

¹ Ephesians ii. 18.

² Yet, while insisting upon these advantages, she was not insensible to the ensnaring temptations connected with this investigating science. See the analysis of her Manuscript, p. 24, 25, note.

³ Rev. xii. 12.

—Assertions which are true, but no way to the purpose: and assertions which are to the purpose, but they are not true. These form the materials of every plausible argument against Christianity. By this mixture of untrue and irrelevant matter with that which is true and pertinent, the understandings of the self-conceited and unwary are subverted. Strictly speaking, no assertion can be to the purpose which is not true. But it may be of such apparently pertinent application, as to lead us to examine less closely into its truth. On the other hand, if it be undeniably true, we sometimes forget to inquire (especially when many arguments of this kind are artfully interwoven together) whether it has any connection with the subject in hand.

In reference to the efforts necessary to resist this mighty spirit, she justly inculcates the importance of a well-furnished and well-disciplined mind, enabling us to meet the infidel upon his own ground of reason, and to fight him with his own sword.

‘Whenever, she observes, “the enemy thus comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.”¹ He, who in his purpose of inscrutable wisdom suffers these “scoffers to come in the last age,”² will not fail to raise up men in his church well fitted to resist them. These champions of the cross must be men “strong in the faith,” and “filled with the Holy Ghost.” But, judging from the instruments which the Lord has employed in times past for his church, we are led to expect that they will be learned in all the wisdom of their enemies—in earthly as well as heavenly wisdom. To oppose the subtleties of Arius, an acute and powerful reasoner was raised up in the person of Athanasius. A wise and learned Augustine was provided to quell the dreadful heresy of Pelagius. Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, and almost all the eminent Reformers, were men of profound erudition, and strong powers of argumentation. “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise;”³ and he could now, and perhaps may, see fit to correct the progress of infidelity by means of “unlearned men.”⁴ Yet, when we look back upon the instruments which he has heretofore raised up, and consider the many advantages of human learning which he has placed within our reach, it seems evidently our duty to use those means to the utmost; at least, until the Lord shall give us some clear indication of a more excellent and acceptable way. “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings our God ordaineth strength.”⁵ Let us then seek to obtain the spirit and temper of a little child. But let us never forget, that, while “in malice we are children,” it behooves us “in understanding to be men.”⁶

She thus happily brings a scriptural illustration to bear upon her subject.

‘David with a sling and a stone fought Goliath and conquered.

¹ Isaiah lix. 19.

⁴ Acts iv. 13.

² 2 Peter iii. 2.

⁵ Psalm viii. 2.

³ 1 Cor. i. 27.

⁶ 1 Cor. xiv. 20.

This time he wanted no other weapon, for God had appointed him no other. But when on a future occasion he was sore pressed by his enemies, he went into the temple of the Lord, and demanded the sword of that same Goliath. "There is none," said he, "like that; give it me."¹ Why should he choose a weapon, which he had seen fall powerless from the hand of the uncircumcised Philistine? Because he knew that in the grasp of the circumcised David it would do goodly service. The hand, not the weapon, had been in fault. Thus may we, if called by the leadings of Providence, avail ourselves of human means, and meet our adversaries hand to hand with their own weapons. Only let us use David's caution. Let us not take the sword of the Philistine, till it has been consecrated in the temple of the Lord.'

The present face of the times, in the judgment of all intelligent observers, seems strongly to mark an impending crisis—as if the "Israel" of God "and the Philistines were putting the battle in array, army against army."² We know on which side the victory is secured. Yet the conflict will doubtless be severe. Let the servants of God gird themselves for "the good fight of faith," with the whole armor of God. This is no time for slumber or inaction. A religion taken upon trust, "received by tradition from our fathers," provides no resource in the hour of trial. A "faith, standing not upon the wisdom of man, but upon the power of God,"³ will be a defence, a stay, a ground of unfailling hope and consolation.

But on this subject we will give Miss Graham's own words in a letter to her cousin. It will be found to be a refreshing specimen of her practical and edifying mode of treating subjects, which have lately been found so fruitful in speculation.

'April, 1827.

'Amongst the many reflections which I have made upon the Millennium, there are two which occupy my mind very much. I thought of them the whole of one day; one was founded upon this text—"And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end, because it is yet a time appointed."⁴ Does not one shudder with horror in anticipating the fulfilment of this prophecy? Who can need purifying more than we do? Who can say that these words are not addressed to us? How dreadful to fall in that time when the Saviour is about to appear! to fall in the very moment when our song of triumph should begin! to fall in the very midst of enemies, of persecutions, of infidelities, in that time when "the devil will have great wrath, because he knoweth that he will have but a short time" to trouble the faithful.⁵ But I think that perhaps God has inspired me with this fear, that I may pray against so

¹ 1 Sam. xxi. 9.

⁴ Daniel xi. 35.

² Ibid. xvii. 21.

⁵ Rev. xii. 12.

³ 1 Cor. ii. 5.

fatal an event ; and this is my reason for communicating it to you. When I was almost overwhelmed with this reflection, these sweet words came to my heart, and made me think of you,—“Two are better than one.”¹ Since in this instance the Scriptures and our hearts agree, I beseech you not to separate yourself from me. Let us love each other always, and pray for each other, that we may not fall. But if unhappily one of us should fall, may the other be ready to raise her up again. If I should fall either into the love of the world, or into infidelity, or into any other sin, do not give me up. Do not think I am a hypocrite. Think that it is to “purify and to try me ;” and pray, that if you fall, I may act in the same way towards you. But in the midst of the thoughts which these sad ideas gave me, those words came for my encouragement,—“They that are with the Lamb are called, and chosen, and faithful.”² You know how precious these words have been to me. But I now saw them in a new point of view. They appeared to me a plain promise introduced exactly at that time to console the saints under their difficulties, by assuring them that they will be a little troop, “called, chosen, and faithful,” against whom no enemies will be able to prevail : that they will have a degree of faith proportioned to their sufferings and necessities. In short, in describing the character of this elect band, I wish to believe, that it describes what we shall be found, if we arrive at that period. If already we are “called and chosen,” shall we not then be “faithful ?” Let us plead this promise. It speaks to me like a voice from heaven. It answers every fear, every uncertainty. Would God choose and call soldiers who would be unfaithful to him ? Will not our captain teach us to go follow him wherever he will have us go ? When I say to myself, ‘Poor and feeble creature, what will you do in that time of distress and temptation ?—faith, which cannot resist a single vain thought, how will you resist the united efforts of the world, the devil, and a wicked heart ?’ Then I answer, ‘Yes ; but has not God said, that the saints in that day shall be “faithful and chosen” by Himself, who cannot choose amiss ? Rest upon his word ; if he sees that you are not fit to fight in the battle of that great day, He will not call you to it ; and if he call you to it, it is his part to give you the fidelity which will be so necessary.’

Miss Graham’s remarks *on the subject of Prophecy* will be interesting, and furnish occasion for some observations suited to the present time. Having insisted upon the importance of mathematical study in reference to the progress of infidelity, she applies the same train of reasoning to the *excitement to the study of Prophecy*, which she justly remarks to be one of the prominent characteristics of our day.

‘There is yet another subject,’ she observes, ‘which, though at present but partially considered, bids fair, ere long, to engross the attention of the Christian world, I allude to the study of prophecy.’

¹ Eccles. iv. 9, 10.

² Rev. xvii. 14.

“Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read”—is the Divine command ; “no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate.”¹ I am particularly led to advert to it in this place, because I have heard with inexpressible pleasure, that these inquiries have already been useful in thinning the ranks of infidelity. The inducements to this study are indeed greater than in any former age of the church. The coincidence between prophecy and its fulfilment is in these latter days grandly conspicuous. It is such, that “he who runs may read.”² The winding up of the whole seems to be near at hand. The last prophecy must ere long, find “her mate,”³ in the last event of humanity. Prediction is almost swallowed up in accomplishment.⁴ Happy are those, who with reason enlightened by a ray of divine intelligence, can trace the wonderful coincidence, which subsists between what God has foretold, and what he has done ; whose thoughts stretch forward in awful, yet fearless anticipation of what God is about to do !

¹ But to attempt any discussion of the views that are held upon this subject, would be foreign to the purpose of this little treatise. If we would enter fully into the prophetic writings, we must, like Daniel “set our faces unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication.”⁵ My object is to hint to the youthful student, who may probably be hereafter engaged in this most interesting contemplation, the extreme importance of having his imagination under the strictest discipline of reason. If ever the “spirit of a sound mind” was necessary, it is so in the investigation of the future prophecies. A more than mathematical accuracy of definition, of statement, and of argument, should be carried into all that is said or written upon this subject. When I consider the extraordinary spirit of inquiry that is now beginning to spread ; when I think I perceive that these inquiries are not only justified by Scripture, but are themselves a part of prophetic fulfilment ; and when I joyfully antici-

¹ Isaiah xxxiv. 16.

² Hab. ii. 2.

³ If this idea was intended to be the exposition—not the accommodation—of the text, it will generally be considered fanciful. A general rule is probably given to stimulate to the investigation of prophecy. But the context will readily supply the particular application of the case alluded to. Miss Graham's thought, however, is expressed by our great Christian philosopher, Lord Bacon, with his accustomed depth and clearness. Expressing his wish that ‘a History of Prophecy’ might be given to the church, he adds his own view of what it should be. ‘The history of prophecy,’ he observes, ‘consists of two relatives, the prophecy and the accomplishment. Hence the nature of the work requires, that throughout all ages of the world, every Scripture prophecy should be compared with the event, for the confirmation of the faith, and the wise instruction of the church, with regard to the interpretation of the prophecies, which yet remain unfulfilled. The latitude, however, must be allowed, which is agreeable to the Divine prophecies (of course Lord Bacon only refers to the several successive and connected parts of one prophetic system) not fulfilled at stated times, but in succession, according to the nature of their Author, to whom “one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” They are not therefore fulfilled punctually at once ; but they have a growing accomplishment through many ages, though the height or fulness of them may refer to a single age or moment.’ Of the work itself, however, he wisely adds—*Let it be treated with wisdom, sobriety, and reverence—or let alone.—Advancement of Learning*, book ii. c. 2.

⁴ Perhaps this expression will be considered to mark the glowing ardency of her feelings, rather than the discipline of her judgment.

⁵ Dan. ix. 3.

pate, that "many shall run to and fro" on this subject, "and knowledge shall be" wonderfully "increased;"¹ it is at such times that I most deeply feel the importance of entreating the young Christian diligently to cultivate, in a spirit of prayer and faith, all those parts of education, which 'especially tend to impart soundness, penetrativeness and energy to his reasoning powers.'

Whatever may be thought of the somewhat novel connection of prophecy with mathematical study, it would have been well for some of our modern interpreters to have disciplined their minds to the principles of this more severe science. Much crude and dogmatical statement would have been restrained, many painful absurdities would have been excluded, and much perplexities spared to the path of the sincere, but unfurnished inquirer. The prophetic study is indeed, as Miss Graham observes, one of the characteristics of our day. The church is at least partially awakened to a full and dutiful acknowledgment of her Lord's command, "*Search the Scriptures.*"² Indeed, apart from the authority of this express command, the universal "spirit of prophecy," as "the testimony of Jesus,"³ while it furnishes the true key of interpretation, gives it an imperative claim upon our attention and regard. The personal benefits of this study are such as richly to repay all the serious attention and humble prayers that may be devoted to it. A minute consideration of some of the most interesting parts of the sacred book, can scarcely fail of enriching the temperate and holy student with most valuable results. Added to which, the succession of events most deeply interesting and solemnly instructive, passing before us through the medium of the daily press, strongly marks our immediate and individual concern in this scriptural research.

Many Christians are unduly repelled by the difficulties and uncertainty, which confessedly belong to the subject. But "the prophets," though they could not understand, felt it their duty and privilege to "search."⁴ "We have also the more sure word of prophecy," with the injunction that "we do well that we take heed to it,"⁵ and with a special and most encouraging promise to stimulate our investigation.⁶

The precise extent of the claim of this study must however be variously estimated. In all cases indeed, the consideration of *fulfilled prophecy* is a component of Christian evidence to our own minds, and will furnish the "answer, that we should be ready always to give to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear."⁷ *The study of unfulfilled prophecy—if it be a general duty—is not in all cases the immediate duty.* It must be subordinated to the primary concern of a personal interest in the Gospel. To a mind awakened to serious inquiry on its own state, yet but slightly tinctured with conviction, and imperfectly directed to the Saviour, the presentment of the claims of

¹ Daniel xii. 4.

⁴ 1 Peter i. 11, 12.

⁷ 1 Peter iii. 15.

² John v. 39.

⁵ 2 Peter i. 19.

³ Rev. xix. 10.

⁶ Rev. i. 3.

unfulfilled prophecy for consideration is a most mischievous evil. The soul is diverted from the main object of contemplation and pursuit. Imagination is exercised instead of faith. A speculative taste is gratified in the place of the practical influence of the truths of the Gospel. This "ignorance of Satan's devices" enables him to get advantage—if not to the ruin of the soul—yet to the "corruption of the mind from the simplicity that is in Christ."¹ And indeed under all circumstances, attention to prophecy must be regulated, in some degree at least, by the leisure, opportunities, and advantages severally belonging to us; not failing to pay due regard to Scriptural proportion, as well as to imperative obligation. That exclusive study, which occupies the place of Christ crucified in doctrine, and forms a substitute for the various exercises of experimental and practical habits—is greatly to be deprecated. Besides the evils with the young inquirer just adverted to, it keeps out of sight many important subjects of obligation and interest included in the sacred canon. It has ministered to mere speculative curiosity and unhallowed presumption. It has originated many of the schisms now unhappily dividing the church, by the substitution of "doubtful disputation" for substantial truth, greatly to the hindrance of Christian privilege, devotedness, and consistency.

Admitting, however, the general importance of this study, the temper in which it is to be conducted is a matter of the first moment. The instance of Daniel produced by Miss Graham, exhibits the finest specimen of the Prophetic Interpreter or Student. Such diligence of research, in prostration of soul, accompanied with such sanctity, humility, faith, and perseverance, will, under the most unfavorable circumstances of external destitution, be honored of God. The exercise of these holy graces will form a safeguard against the delusive influence of human speculations, and will enable us to improve the results of divine teaching for the high purposes for which they were vouchsafed. The investigation of prophecy will thus become a cheering support to us in the anticipation of trials, and a quickening stimulus to the discharge of our immediate responsibilities.

The warranted expectation, however, of human help may probably have been overrated. Though in this, more than in any other age, "many have run to and fro"—yet it may be doubted how far Miss Graham's hopes have been realized by an increase of "knowledge"² commensurate with the extent of research. The march of Christian intellect has been in most cases retarded by a defect of spiritual or intellectual qualifications. Some of the more elaborate and practised writers want that unction and spirituality, which evidence a mind divinely-instructed for this "search into the deep things of God;" and this deficiency of the stamp of heavenly influence materially weakens our confidence in the results from their subsidiary intellectual advantages. Other writers of a more

¹ 2 Corinthians ii. 11; xi. 3.

² Daniel xii. 4.

decidedly evangelical school, are too sparingly furnished with those resources of erudition and intelligence, which doubtless were intended to reflect valuable, though subordinate, light upon the prophetic page. Some, again, of the same school, have taken up crude and undigested views—the result of imagination, impulse, or excitement, rather than of matured judgment and consideration; while the dogmatism and self-sufficiency of others give no proof of divine suggestion, and offer no satisfaction to the inquiring mind. There is probably no accredited writer in the various prophetic schools who has not contributed his quantum in clearing up difficulties, and throwing light upon some department of the subject. Yet it may be doubted whether a connected and comprehensive scheme of the divine system has yet been satisfactorily developed: and in the different schemes that have been proposed, much Christian discernment is required to separate in them what is solidly established, from what is unsubstantial and speculative. Human helps must therefore, under all circumstances, be subsidiary—not primary. God's book must ever maintain its own supreme place. The scattered rays reflected from different parts of its prophetic system (such as the comparison of the Books of Daniel and John) and centering in one point, will often furnish a strong and clear light for the direction and encouragement of the Christian student. We feel therefore great confidence in recommending a Berean search of the Scripture as the ground-work of prophetic investigation;¹ not omitting to avail ourselves of the industry and intelligence of accredited writers for the expansion of our views and the elucidation of our difficulties; but at the same time exercising our judgment, in dependence upon our heavenly Teacher, again to compare the exposition of their systems with the light of the sacred book. In this process of inquiry, we are persuaded, that “the wise shall understand,” (even though they be “wayfaring fools,”²) as far as is consistent with the divine will, and necessary for their duty and comfort; and for the rest they may well be content to wait for the full splendor of the light of the heavenly world.

May the writer without presumption be allowed to suggest a few hints relative to the clear interpretation and profitable study of prophecy?

1. *Let the special need of Divine influence be primarily considered.* Far be it from the writer to underrate the intellectual qualifications. He is well aware of the treasures of erudition, that have been effectively applied to this most important subject. He would have the whole field of prophecy traversed with all the mind and research that can be brought to bear upon it. But he cannot forget that the teaching wisdom belongs to God; and that it is the irradiation of his holy light, which can alone illumine the dark places in this to us uncertain track.³ Let the interpreter duly

¹ Compare Acts xvii. 11, 12.

² Daniel xii. 10, with Isaiah xxxv. 8.

³ It is worthy of remark, that Daniel's knowledge of unfulfilled prophecy is distinctly connected with the Spirit of prayer. Daniel ii. 16—23; ix. 20—27.

weigh his special and weighty responsibilities. How large a portion of the grace and "wisdom that is from above" does he need, to induce that waiting spirit so acceptable to God; to restrain the rising of dogmatism, spiritual self-will and conceit; to repress "private interpretations," so inconsistent with the comprehensiveness of Scripture prophecy: to guard against giving his own mind in the professed desire only to interpret the mind of God; to take an entire view of the whole range of prophecy, instead of contracting his interest to a few favorite points; to forbear with the decided views of his opponents; readily to retract his indigested opinions, and to yield his prejudices to the influence of more correct and enlarged apprehensions; and habitually to connect every view with the glory of his Saviour, and the extension of his kingdom! These are confessedly responsibilities of no ordinary moment. They forbid trifling with the subject, as if its clear light were revealed by some momentary inspiration; they realize the urgent need of "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" to "enlighten the eyes of his understanding;"¹ and they inculcate a habit of dependence, supplication, seriousness, and that reverence which Lord Bacon so justly describes as indispensable to the profitable consideration of the subject. In the defect of this spirit, successive systems of prophecy have been ingeniously woven; the interpreters "come together," and bring before the church their several hypotheses and conclusions; and "every one," as at Corinth, "hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation."² It cannot be doubted, but this defect of Christian simplicity is one main cause of the indeterminate apprehension of the subject. Who does not see how needful is "singleness of eye," the gift of God, to reflect light upon the mind; while an "evil eye," affected with some natural bias, leads us in the review of the results of human ingenuity to exclaim, "How great is this darkness!"³

2. *Let a forbearing spirit be inculcated in this research.* The importance of this spirit in an intellectual view is sufficiently obvious, as a guard from the prevalent evils of self-conceit. Its influence in every department of sacred truth—*especially in the field of prophecy*—is of yet higher moment. The writer's own studies in this field have brought him to the fixed conclusion—that many of the controverted points (those, for example, connected with our Lord's second Advent,) are embarrassed with difficulties on both sides, sufficient to preserve wise and humble men from dogmatizing on either part: and to excite mutual respect and forbearance, rather than what we are too often constrained to see—"brethren grudging one against another."⁴ The event indeed is a doctrine of faith—

¹ Eph. i. 17, 18.

² 1 Cor. xiv. 26.

³ Matt. vi. 22, 23. It is a remarkable expression—"None of the wicked (using the term in the large scriptural sense) shall understand," Daniel xii. 10. The outward sources of information are open to them. But their pride wilfully excludes them from the direct inlets of Divine light. See Matthew xi. 25, 26. 1 Corinthians ii. 14; iii. 18—20.

⁴ James v. 9. Comp. Matt. xxiv. 48, 49.

absolutely certain. The time and circumstantials being imperfectly revealed, are matters of forbearance; on which all, even the most sober, interpreters have been constrained in the course of investigation, in some points of more or less moment, to retract, modify, or restate their views. Indeed, prophecy, according to the Scriptural definition, is "a light that shineth in a dark place,"¹ yet not surely the light of "perfect day;" and well would it be for us, if the confession of our ignorance would find vent in the Apostle's adoring contemplation—"How unsearchable are his judgments! and his ways past finding out!"² We may indeed justly expect clearer light to dawn upon us, as the consummation of the grand events draws on. Meanwhile we must combine diligent study with cautious application. We must be content for the most part with the statement of general views and results. If the events are clear, the time, mode, and means of their accomplishment are often undefined. We are assured, that none of the Divine predictions can fall to the ground; that the events contemplated in them are the fruit of the Lord's superintending love to his church, and that they will all issue in the final advancement of his own glory. In this recollection it is most suitable to cultivate that truly Christian spirit of patient expectancy, which, in child-like humility, not in slumbering indolence, is content to leave to the Lord the unfolding of his own purposes.

The Writer may be permitted to observe that the indeterminate fixing of dates to the several prophetic eras, offers large room for the exercise of this forbearing spirit. Prophets, with all their warranted confidence, were modest. They never spoke without a clear commission—"Thus saith the Lord." Interpreters of prophecy are not always so modest. The confident mode of calculation which is sometimes adopted, might lead us to suppose, not only that the several periods, but also that their commencing points, were, like Daniel's weeks,³ absolutely revealed. To a few of the most important eras, indeed, dates, more or less probable, *but not absolutely decisive*, may be assigned; but in periods of less moment, experience has fully shown how unsatisfactory all attempts to fix the precise periods of events have proved and are likely to prove. Our Lord, while he reproved listless indifference to "the signs of the times,"⁴ rebuked with no less decision this presumptuous interference with his sovereign prerogative.⁵ 'If ever,'—as Miss Graham admirably observes—"the spirit of a sound mind" is necessary, it is so in the investigation of the future prophecies.' Wise and holy men of God will learn to speak with caution and reserve upon subjects obscurely revealed. General views are sufficient for the ground and encouragement of faith. And the cloud that still covers this mystic history of futurity, abundantly shows, that the end of prophecy was not to make us prophets—but to "set us upon our watch-

¹ 2 Peter, i. 19.

² Rom. xi. 33.

³ Daniel ix. 24—27.

⁴ Matt. xvi. 3.

⁵ Acts i. 7.

towers," as diligent and humble inquirers, seeking to "have understanding of the signs of the times, that we might know what Israel ought to do,"² and to expect.

Indeed, this designed darkness subserves various and important uses. It furnishes a needful and wholesome check upon human speculation. Had the Great Author of prophecy intended it as the rule of life, he would doubtless have written it with a sunbeam. In its present mode and character of revelation it is however admirably suited—not indeed to indulge unwarrantable curiosity, but to exercise our faith, to call forth our Christian graces, to enliven our hopes, to quicken our anticipation of the ultimate triumph of the kingdom of Christ; and meanwhile, that we should mark with soberness the gradual development of progress towards this glorious consummation. It is far more profitable—instead of making a framework for ourselves—to be looking in the Lord's best time for that clear reflection of light in the fulfilment of prophecy, which will awe even the most inconsiderate to conviction.—"This is the finger of God. What hath God wrought!"³

3. *Let the subject be ever considered as a practical study.* It is a sign of an unhealthy, excited temperament, if the prophetic parts of Scripture be more interesting than the preceptive—that is—if we are more conversant with matters of uncertain interpretation, than with the subjects that relate to our immediate duty. If the prophetic study be dissociated from its practical character and consequences, our prepossessed fancy is far more likely to give the interpretation than the Divine Spirit. The blessing belongs to those that "*keep the things* that are written in the words of this prophecy."⁴ The fruit of Daniel's research was that which is most specially needed at the present eventful moment—intercession for the Church and for the land.⁵ Habakkuk went to his watch-tower—not to speculate in idle curiosity, but as we have before hinted, to be in readiness to hear the valuable lessons of reproof and instruction that were designed for him.⁶ Supposing that the period of accomplishment is far distant, yet there is a large preparatory work of prayer, exertion, and Christian devotedness, urgently pressing

¹ Hab. ii. 1.

² 1 Chron. xii. 32. One of the most profound and sober expositors of prophecy well deserves to be heard on this point. 'The folly of interpreters,' observes Sir Isaac Newton, 'has been to foretell times and things by the prophecy of the Revelation, as if God designed to make them prophets. By this rashness they have not only exposed themselves, but brought the prophecy also into contempt. The design of God, when he gave them this, and the prophecies of the Old Testament, was, not to gratify men's curiosity by enabling them to foreknow things; but to the end that, after, they were fulfilled, they might be interpreted by the event; and his own providence, not the wisdom and skill of the interpreters, be thus manifested thereby to the world.' Bishop Hurd also well remarks to the same point, that 'the declared end of prophecy is, not that we may be enabled by it to foresee things before they come to pass; but that when they come to pass, we may acknowledge the divine Author of the prophecy.' (Serm. VIII.) 'Even the pophecies of Christ,' as the same author observes, (Serm. V.) 'could not give full conviction till the time of their accomplishment had arrived.

³ Exodus viii. 19. Numbers xxiii. 23.

⁴ Rev. i. 3.

⁵ Daniel ix. 2, 3, 16—19.

⁶ Hab. ii. 1.

upon us. And far better shall we be employed in girding ourselves to the discharge of the practical obligations of prophecy, than in minutely tracing out the conjectured period and mode of its fulfilment, and in attempting to narrow its wide and comprehensive sphere by uncertain application to the little particularities of our own time and place. Is there no danger, while fixing the dates, and describing the circumstantials of the grand coming events—lest we forget that every page of prophecy is a direct personal revelation to our own souls, and lest we too slightly regard those clearest predictions of the sacred page—the promises of God to his people, and his threatenings to the unbelieving world? May not even the comprehensive rule of “seeking first the kingdom of God,” in “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,” be sometimes unhappily subordinated to the absorbing interest awakened by the glowing prospects of the Millennial reign?

How much has been lost to the church by a speculative contemplation of the prophetic view of the doctrine of our Lord's second advent! If, instead of filling up the outlines more from the resources of imagination than from the substance of Scripture, the faith of the church had been singly fixed upon the glory of this consummating event, and intensely exercised in the glow of expectancy, how different would have been her aspect at the present moment! What a bond of union would have subsisted among her members! What an atmosphere of love would have pervaded her territory! What a spring of holy consecration would have been in extended activity! It ill becomes servants, looking for the return of their absent lord, to spend themselves in discussing the mode and circumstantials of his coming, when they might be far more suitably employed in preparing the house for his reception, and in readiness to give an immediate answer to his welcome knock!²

The obscurity that hangs over the precise period of our Lord's coming is indeed a most wise and gracious dispensation, to invigorate the church in every age with the high privilege and obligation of looking for this triumphant crisis. Whatever views therefore tend merely to captivate the imagination, to gratify curiosity, and thus to divert the attention from the present duties connected with this anticipation—these must be regarded as the unscriptural delusions of man's conceit. This spirit of constant expectancy may be considered as the perfecting feature of the Christian character.³ It concentrates all the practical and animating exercises of the Gospel. What an encouragement does it supply to the assurance of faith!⁴ What a stimulus to activity,⁵ devotedness,⁶ abounding love,⁷ heavenly conversation,⁸ sobriety of spirit,⁹ readiness of habit,¹⁰

¹ Matt. vi. 38. Romans xiv. 17, with Luke xvii. 21.

² Luke xii. 35, 36.

³ See 1 Cor. i. 7.

⁴ Heb. x. 37, 38.

⁵ Matthew xxv. 35—40. Luke xix. 13—26. 2 Peter i. 5—11.

⁶ Rev. xvi. 15; xxii. 7.

⁷ 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13. Compare James v. 9.

⁸ Phil. iii. 20, 21. 2 Peter iii. 11—14.

⁹ Luke xxi. 34. Phil. iv. 5. 1 Thess. v. 1—8. 1 Peter i. 13; iv. 7.

¹⁰ Luke xii. 35—40.

and watchful preparation for eternity!¹ What support does it furnish in the hour of trial, whether from the immediate visitations of God,² or the persecuting enmity of man!³ What materials does it give for personal edification,⁴ compassionate labors for the unconverted,⁵ and mutual exhortation⁶ and comfort⁷ in the church of God! How cheering is the prospect which it holds out of complete transformation into the image of our beloved Lord!⁸ What patient hope⁹ and joyful anticipation¹⁰ does it bring into the waiting soul! So eminently practical—so richly consolatory—is the believing and habitual contemplation of the coming of our Lord! Indeed when we realize the hope of body and soul at this blissful era being equal participants of the eternal redemption¹¹—the happiness of every member of the body consummated in the complete glorification of the whole body—and the church, “filled with all the fulness of God,” presenting to the universe the entire “fulness of Him that filleth all in all”¹²—we may well conceive, that never was an event so joyful known on earth since the fall of man. We wonder not that “the whole creation,” now “groaning and travailing together in pain” under the ruins of sin, should then be awakened to joyful exultation in its “deliverance from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”¹³

This scriptural privilege of expectancy was however inculcated upon the church, while the event which it contemplated could only be seen through the long vista of some thousand years. It was intended therefore, not necessarily to imply the approach of the grand crisis,¹⁴ but to mark the habit of mind with which it should be awaited. The delineation of this habit which has just been given, evidently includes all the essential principles of sanctification and of happiness. We cannot therefore but see sufficient reason for the large space which the event occupies in the enforcement of Christian obligation, and the prospects of Christian hope. Our divine Saviour is brought eternally near to his people.¹⁵ His perfect likeness is the immediate consequence of his vision.¹⁶ His glory is their everlasting joy.¹⁷

It is painful to reflect, that a speculative study of prophecy should have so materially injured the influence of those prospects of the church upon her present duties and privileges. The minute descriptive details, that have been sometimes connected with the coming of Christ in his kingdom (not to speak of their doubtful scriptural authority, and their closer alliance to earth than

¹ Matt. xxiv. 42; xxv. 13. Luke xxi. 36. 1 Thess. v. 9—18. Rev. xvi. 15.

² 1 Thess. iv. 13. ³ 2 Thess. i. 6—10. ⁴ Jude 14, 15, with 20, 21.

⁵ Ibid. with 22, 23. ⁶ Heb. x. 25. ⁷ 1 Thess. iv. 16—18; v. 8—11.

⁸ Phil. i. 6; iii. 21. 1 Thess. v. 23, 24. 1 John iii. 2.

⁹ 2 Thess. iii. 5. James v. 7, 8.

¹⁰ Isaiah xxv. 9; xxvi. 19. Luke xxi. 28. Rom. xii. 11. Titus ii. 13.

¹¹ Romans viii. 23. Phil. iii. 21.

¹² Psalms xvi. 11—13; xcvi. 5—9. Rom. viii. 21, 22

¹² Eph. iii. 19; i. 23.

¹³ See the mistake on this point corrected in the Thessalonian church, 2 Thess. ii. 1—2.

¹⁴ Rev. iii. 12; vii. 15—17.

¹⁵ 1 John iii. 2.

¹⁷ Matthew xxv. 21. John xvii. 24. Rev. iii. 21.

to heaven) have a strong tendency to repress a spiritual contemplation of this great event.¹ Even the details given in the prophetic books are much under the veil. Interpreters expound them according to the principles of their different systems: and after all their diligence and labor, much is left unexplained, or resting upon conjectural support. In these things the writer is content to "walk by faith, not by sight."² All that is necessary is revealed. We shall be as happy as God can make us. As to any precise knowledge, "it doth not yet appear what we shall be."³ And such knowledge we want not. It exhibits a far more enlarged expectancy to be assured, that it will be something that we neither know nor can know—interminable bliss without sin, and with Christ. Our happiness centres in the certainty and glory, not in the circumstantial, of the event. And surely the "shaking of earth and heaven,"⁴ which seems to be at hand, will quicken the cry for our expected Lord—"Come quickly, take to thyself the kingdom, and reign with all thy saints." The waiting Christian, in these times of special trial of the church, "lifts up his head" full of joy and expectation.⁵ Faith overcomes the tremendous thought of wrath and judgment, as the harbingers of his coming;⁶ and still the cry is re-echoed to the solemn declaration—"Surely I come quickly; Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."⁷

III.—ON CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AND PRACTICAL RELIGION.

MISS GRAHAM'S correspondence, flowing in an easy and natural strain, will be generally interesting. Even where no striking features are visible, an affectionate earnestness, tender sympathy, and a direct application of the first principles of the Gospel to the several cases of her friends cannot fail of being observed.

The following letter appears to have been written to a friend, newly awakened to concern for her eternal interests.

‘ November, 1826.

‘ I fancy that you have for some time past felt a conviction, that religion is something more than you used to think it, more than the world in general seem to think it. But yet perhaps, you do not see

¹ Bishop Hall's beautiful meditations were not less suited to our day than to his—"O blessed Saviour, what a strange variety of conceits do I find concerning thy thousand years' reign! What riddles are there in that prophecy, which no human tongue can read! Where fix to the beginning of that marvellous millenary, and where the end, and what manner of reign it shall be, whether temporal or spiritual, on earth or in heaven, undergoes as many constructions as there are pens that have undertaken it. How busy are the tongues of men! How are their brains taken up with the endless construction of this enigmatical truth, when in the mean time the care of the spiritual reign in their hearts is neglected. O my Saviour, while others weary themselves with this disquisition of thy personal reign upon earth for a thousand years—let it be the whole bent and study of my soul, to make sure of my personal reign with thee in heaven to all eternity.

² 2 Cor. v. 7.

³ 1 John iii. 2.

⁴ Heb. xii. 26, 27.

⁵ See Luke xxi. 28.

⁶ 2 Thess. i. 8. Rev. i. 7.

⁷ Rev. xxii. 20.

very clearly, what more it is that religion requires of you. You see that there is nothing in this vain world capable of satisfying the desires of your immortal spirit; but you do not clearly comprehend what there is in religion to satisfy all our desires. You seek the Lord; but you do not yet feel as if you had found Him. You probably spend much time in reading the Scriptures; but sometimes they seem obscure and unintelligible, sometimes dry and uninteresting. You often pray; but do not always find either comfort or delight in prayer. Sometimes you feel as if you could give up every earthly enjoyment for one glimpse of that "love of Christ which passeth knowledge;" and at other times it seems to you very foolish and unreasonable to pretend to more religion than other people. This is what many feel who are beginning to be very anxious about religion. I cannot help indulging a strong hope, that you will soon find in the love of Jesus all that you want to make you happy; only let me beg of you to seek Him simply, under the conviction that we can neither do nor think anything good without Him; that "every thought is evil, only evil, and that continually;"¹ and that, while we continue in this state, we cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God, because they will appear "foolishness to us."² The change which every person must undergo, before they can truly receive Christ as their Saviour, is described in terms no less striking—"Ye must be *born again*."³ "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a *new creature*; old things are passed away; behold! all things are become new!"⁴ In other parts it is described as a change from death unto life, "from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God."⁵ But I will not multiply instances. Surely such a change as this cannot be the cold, wordly, heartless religion, with which the generality of people sit down satisfied! Surely it is a change we have no power to make in ourselves. When God "breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life," it was a wonderful act of his creating power.⁶ But when he breathes spiritual life into the soul of one "dead in trespasses and sins," this seems more wonderful; and yet this is what we vainly think we can do ourselves. But if we can once be convinced, that we are so utterly worthless and sinful, that none but Christ can save us, then we shall go to Him for everything. If we want repentance, wisdom, holiness, salvation, all these are His to give; He promises to give them to every one that asks Him. O be much in prayer to this precious Saviour! He has declared, that none shall seek him in vain. Those who leave trusting off in themselves, and cling with a single and undivided heart to the cross of Christ, and "count everything else but loss, so they may win Christ and be found in Him"⁷—what words can describe their blessedness! How true it is, that those who seek happiness in any-

¹ Gen. vi. 5.⁴ 2 Cor. v. 17.⁷ Phil. iii. 7-9.² 1 Cor. ii. 14.⁵ Acts xxvi. 18.³ John iii. 7.⁶ Gen. ii. 7.

thing except Christ Jesus, are "hewing out to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water!" Come then, my most dearly loved friend, come with me to "the fountain of living waters"—come to Him who has said—"If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink"—as if he had said—"If there be any poor sinner, who has begun to find out that the pleasures of this world cannot quench his thirst after happiness, if he long for something less vain and empty and unsatisfying, let him come unto me." Do you desire to give yourself to Christ, to make Him your all in all? Then let not any fears or misgivings keep you away from Him, for He "waits to be gracious" to you. Your sins need not keep you away; for He came to call sinners. He calls Himself the friend of sinners: and indeed, till you are taught by his Spirit, how exceedingly sinful you are, you cannot prize Him as you ought. Let me entreat you often to dwell on the "precious promises" of Scripture. Remember, that "in Him all the promises are yea and amen;" and if we plead in his name for their fulfilment, the truth and faithfulness of God who cannot lie stand engaged to perform them for us. There is one in particular which seems to me full of encouragement; it describes so fully the state of heart we want, and promises to give what it describes to those who inquire of the Lord. See Ezek. xxxvi. 25—37.¹

The next letter is of a later date, and implies a more distinct advance of Christian knowledge in her friend.

Let me use the privilege of friendship, and entreat you to look less at the dark side of your prospects, and more at the unspeakable mercies with which God has favored you; particularly that he has given you the greatest blessing he has to give, in calling you to become his reconciled child by faith in Christ Jesus. And having given you an interest in his Son, "shall he not with him freely give you all things?"²—all things that are good for you, my dear friend. If therefore your wishes are not satisfied, it must be, because it is not for your good to satisfy them. Your lot has been chosen out for you by one, who is infinitely wise and kind, as the very best for your present and eternal happiness, and "He doeth all things well." You will ultimately find peace in religion; I am sure you will; and in the meantime is it not a blessing that you are not permitted to take up your rest here, and find the false destroying peace, which so many experience in wordly enjoyments? What if you were to ask God in Christ's name for the fulfilment of such a promise as this—"Behold, I will bring in health and cure, and I will heal him, and will reveal unto him the abundance of peace and of truth"³—would he deny you? Considering that no promise of scripture "is of private interpretation"—not meant for one part of the church, or one age of it, but for the whole flock of Christ *now*, and every member of it, and therefore for *you*—considering too, "that all the promises of God are yea and amen to us in Christ Jesus;"⁴ and

¹ John vii. 37.

² Romans viii. 32.

³ Jer. xxxiii. 6.

⁴ 2 Cor. i. 20.

that Christ himself has said—"If ye shall ask anything in my name, *I will give it you*"¹—what encouragement have we to take these promises to God in prayer, to wrestle with him, and declare with holy confidence—"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!"² Oh! he would bless you; and his "blessing maketh rich, and *he addeth no sorrow with it.*"³ My dear friend, you must come to God thus, and "give him no rest," till he grant you the promised blessing. You must not take a denial. May the Spirit of prayer be abundantly poured out upon you! It is our privilege to take our sins and sorrows, and cast them upon Christ; he has already borne their agonizing weight; why should we groan under them? "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." Would that I could act as I advise! But I fall very, very far short. Even my desires after this state of mind are miserably faint and cold; but let us both take comfort in the reflection, that we are accepted *in Christ*; "complete in him;"⁴ beloved, not for *our* deservings, but for *his*;⁵ and his are "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." When we fail, Christ remains the same; and it is for the sake of what he has done, that God will accept us; not for anything we can do; or we might indeed go mourning all the day long.⁶

These letters mark the general tone of Miss Graham's correspondence, in affectionate counsel and Scriptural encouragement. The case to which they primarily refer is among the most difficult and delicate within the compass of Christian instruction. No service is more valuable to the sincere but intelligent inquirer, than to enter into his case with tenderness, forbearance, and anxious consideration of his difficulties. Vague and ill-defined directions throw but little light upon his path. Even the primary and immediate counsel, guiding him to the Saviour of sinners, needs a present and particular application to his individual state. His difficulties will, indeed, vary according to his simplicity, sincerity, and earnestness. But, under all circumstances, the *instant duty of believing in Christ* must be inculcated. No deficiency of spiritual apprehensions must be allowed to hinder immediate attention "to this work of God."⁶

¹ John xiv. 14.

² Gen. xxxii. 25.

³ Prov. x. 22.

⁴ Colossians ii. 10.

⁵ Ephesians i. 6.

⁶ John vi. 28, 29. This instant duty of believing is however questioned by some of our modern religionists—either as seeming to imply a natural power to believe, or as inconsistent with the manifest inability to believe without a Divine principle. But our Lord inculcated the duty upon the unbelieving multitude, in this passage, *in answer to their professed inquiry upon the subject of duty.* He subsequently enforced it upon the same class of hearers (John xii. 36, with 37—40.) Besides, as sin is the neglect or resistance of obligation, if faith be not the duty of the unconverted, unbelief is not their sin—consequently—not what the Gospel repeatedly declares it to be—the primary ground of their condemnation (John iii. 18, 19; xii. 48; xvi. 8, 9; 2 Thessalonians ii. 10, 11.) This system of measuring duty by ability, and of admitting inability to cancel obligation, equally annuls every exercise of love and obedience, by which man is connected with his God, but for which he is no less incapacitated, than for the spiritual habit of faith. It argues also a forgetfulness of the justice of the Divine requirements, and of the responsibility of that sinful inclination, which constitutes the principle of his impotency to comply with them. The commission of the Gospel is an universal call both to repentance and faith. (Mark i. 15; xvi. 15, 16; Acts xvii. 30.) The cross of Christ is held up to the whole world. (Isaiah xlv. 22.) The Holy Spirit employs its awakening and attractive influ-

The Gospel was not intended to answer the question—"What shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?"¹ But it affords a satisfactory reply to a question more nearly interesting to the condition of a sinner—"How can man be just with God?"² It opens, by the instrumentality of faith, a free, immediate, universally accessible way to favorable acceptance with our offended God. No perplexing course of preparatory discipline is required. All are invited without limitation, without delay. Infinite mercy and grace are provided for infinite need. Only those that feel will ask; and all that ask shall have. Thus a sense of sin is the prerequisite, without which no man will come (for "the whole need not the physician"³); but it is no part of the warrant to come. The Scripture has nowhere prescribed any uniform rule, or measured out the precise extent of necessary conviction. All constitutions are not formed alike; and therefore pungency is no certain proof of sincerity. Many are brought without a process of painful exercise to a simple and clear reception of the truth.

The soul is as welcome to Christ at the first moment of invitation as at any successive period; and protracted conflict manifests only the stubborn power of unbelief—a sin, which the spirit of God will not fail to apply as matter of humiliating conviction.⁴ To insist therefore upon a determined measure or intensity of well-defined conviction as a preparation to faith, is an infringement upon the freeness and simplicity of the Gospel. The law also, as the instrument to produce this conviction,⁵ must be used in immediate connection with Christ. *He* is the life; and if he be not set forth at the commencement, there will be only the temporary and unsatisfactory change from a state of indifference to a state of bondage, without any effective principle of holiness or of privilege; and the man will be satisfied without that entire simplicity of faith and self-dedication so indispensable to salvation. Even in the exhibition of Christ, the mind of the inquirer must be diverted from a too minute and anxious analysis of its own exercises of faith to a fixed contemplation of the glorious Person presented to view. The emphasis of the invitation is, "Look—Come unto me."⁶ The first sensation of rest will be connected not with a precise knowledge of our own feelings, but with an entire dependence upon the work of Christ. Though self-examination is intimately connected with the prosperity and advance of the Christian life; yet it must never be employed to originate our peace and hope in the Gospel; but to ascertain the reality of our hope; to detect false confidence and backsliding; to bring to us the warranted enjoyment of "the testimony of our consciences," in regard to the consistency of our profession;⁷

ence as the means of quickening sinners to life. (John xii. 32.) Thus the grace of God is glorified, while the wilful unbelief of man alone excludes him from the free justification of the Gospel, and consequently leaves him without excuse.

¹ Mark x. 17.

² Job ix. 2.

³ Matthew ix. 12.

⁴ See John xvi. 8, 9.

⁵ See Rom. iii. 20; vii. 7. Galatians iii. 24. Compare Matthew xix. 17--20.

⁶ Isaiah xlv. 22. Matt. xi. 28.

⁷ See 2 Cor. i. 12.

and to mark our progress in knowledge, experience, and practical devotedness. One further point connected with the case of the inquirer is of indispensable moment. He may be assured, that there is no indefinitely future period—no “day of the Lord’s power” more favorable for his acceptance than the present; and that no deficiency of knowledge can acquit him of the obligation of an instant surrender of himself to God. *This very moment the Lord demands his unreserved faith, and his whole heart; and every delay brings a fresh charge of guilt, widens the distance, and increases the difficulty.*

The following letter, written about two months before her death, gives an interesting view of her own search after truth, and marks a discriminating apprehension of the Gospel.

‘*Stoke Fleming, Oct. 1830.*

‘I am grieved that you should for a moment imagine that I think our dear ——— must be lost, because she does not subscribe to the doctrines of Calvin. I do not myself so much as know what all Calvin’s doctrines are, or whether I should subscribe to them myself. I have read one book of Calvin’s, many parts of which pleased me much; I mean his Institutes, which Bishop Horsley says ought to be in every clergyman’s library. Further than this I know nothing of Calvin, or his opinions. I certainly did not form one single opinion from his book, for I had formed all my opinions long before from the Bible.’ You may remember my telling you that some years ago I declined greatly, almost entirely (inwardly) from the ways of God, and in my breast was an infidel, a disbeliever in the truths of the Bible. When the Lord brought me out of that dreadful state, and established my faith in his word, I determined to take that word *alone* for my guide. I read nothing else for between three and four months, and the Lord helped me to pray over every word that I read. At that time, and from that reading, all my religious opinions were formed, and I have not changed one of them since. I knew nothing then of Calvin. I have said so much, dear ———, because I think it a very wicked thing to do, as you seem to think I do, to call Calvin or any man “master on earth,” or to make any human writer our guide in spiritual things. Christ only should be our master, and his word our guide, and his Spirit our teacher; and that Holy Spirit will be given to us if we ask for it. But I suppose by the doctrines of Calvin you meant the doctrine of predestination, which Calvin, in common with many other of God’s saints, believed and preached. My belief and settled opinion about predestination, you will find expressed more clearly than any words of mine can do, in John vi. 37, 39, 65. Rom. viii. 28—30. Rom. ix. Eph. i. 3—6, 11. 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14. 2 Tim. i. 9, 10. Titus i. 1, 2. 1 Peter i. 2—5. 1 John iv. 19. Rev. xvii. 8. John xv. 16. I also join in every word of the 17th Article of our

¹ See chap. ii.

church; so much so, that if asked my opinion about predestination, I should give it in those very words, from the impossibility of finding any others, which in so short a space expressed my meaning so well. But as this article is only of *human* authority, I should therefore bring forward the proof from the Scriptures of that God who cannot lie. I have just given you a few texts as they struck me. They are, I believe, enough for my present purpose: but detached texts lose much of their power: it is the whole sense of the whole Bible that should determine us; and since "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, (for they are *foolishness* to him)," let us pray to become spiritual, "that we may know the things that are freely given us of God."¹ The above texts will give you an idea of my opinion. Indeed some of them are exceedingly plain and strong, and full, in their account of the doctrine. I endeavor to receive them as a little child, in their plain literal meaning.

'But to return to our dear —; I think the doctrine of election *essential* to the *comfort* and *consistency* of our walk with God; because I deem it essential to receive the whole Bible, and every truth contained in every part of the Bible, without partiality or gainsaying. But I do not consider a belief in the doctrine essentially necessary to salvation. I *do* consider a simple trust in the atonement and righteousness of Jesus Christ as *absolutely necessary* to salvation. If then, dearest —, your beloved friend and mine too (for I do most sincerely love her), possesses this simple reliance on the death and obedience of Christ for salvation, doubt not that she will be saved; though she may not yet have been able to receive those high and humbling doctrines which very few Christians do receive in the commencement of their course,² and which some cannot to the very end thoroughly embrace. Many, however, I think embrace the actual doctrine, though they cannot bear the words predestination, election, &c.: a strange dislike, since both words happen to be taken from Scripture. My beloved — would have been quite distressed, had I supported the doctrine of predestination in my conversations with her *under the name of predestination*; and yet we often conversed on the thing itself, and subjects connected with it; nor did I find her ideas differ greatly from mine. "Other foundation can no man lay than is laid, Jesus Christ." All who are built on this foundation, who are thus founded on the Rock of Ages, must be secure. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts. xvi. 31, &c. "He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life; and he that

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 14 with 12.

² In the early stage of her own course this holy doctrine had excited much repugnance, though she was afterwards enabled to receive it with a most simple and child like faith, and to set it forth (as we have before remarked) with a clearness of statement and power of argument, that marked the richness and maturity of her theological views. (See her Freedom of Divine Grace, referred to at p. 55.) She observes to her cousin the stimulus and support which she had received from this doctrine in seasons of distressing deadness in her spiritual apprehensions.

believeth *not* the Son, *shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*" John iii. 36. See also John iii. 15, 16, 18 ; v. 24 ; vi. 40, 47 ; xi. 25, 26, &c.⁷

The two next letters are of the class of those which were formerly adduced in illustration of her clear apprehensions of scriptural truth. The first letter introduces some incidental notices of interest. It seems to have been written to the correspondent whom she had formerly addressed on the subject of Christian study.

‘*Stoke Fleming, Jan. 4, 1827.*

‘MY OWN DEAR FRIEND,

‘Every letter I receive from you gives me fresh cause of thankfulness, and increases my hope, that you have learnt of Him who teacheth, and will certainly never leave you till he has given you that “joy and peace in believing;” which all His children sooner or later experience. I trust that the love of my God to you will be a constant source of thanksgiving and self-abasement to me: for oh! what thanks can I render to Him, for the love with which he is now calling you out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son? And how can I ever be sufficiently humbled, when I reflect how unfaithfully and inconsistently I have acted towards you? One instance in particular is now fresh in my memory. You once asked me to write to you; and I put it off from day to day, till at last I wickedly persuaded myself that I could not do it at all. I hope you will forgive this cruel neglect, “as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you;” and that we shall be enabled henceforth, to love and help one another in His strength, and for His sake.

‘Dear——, how can you say that I am your dearest friend, and only comforter? I glory in the thought, that you have a friend, whose love is stronger than death, and a Comforter, who is able to make you rejoice with joy unspeakable; and to whose blessing and influence we must refer it, that such poor helpless and sinful creatures as we are, can ever be of the slightest use in helping or comforting each other. I know you long to call Jesus your Friend, and the Holy Spirit your Comforter; and where does this longing come from? Not surely from your own evil heart; for from that corrupt source can proceed nothing but hatred or indifference to God and His ways. Besides, it is a feeling you once knew nothing of. Believe me—rather believe the Scriptures when they say—that every desire of the soul after God is inspired by Himself, and is the fruit of His own free love in Christ Jesus—“I have loved thee with an everlasting love; *therefore* with loving kindness have I drawn thee.” “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me; I will in no wise cast out.”¹ Now, do you not

¹ Jer. xxxi. 3; John xv. 16; vi. 44, 37.

feel yourself drawn towards God? Does not your heart sometimes choose Christ in preference to every earthly blessing? Do you not come to Christ in prayer, beseeching Him to receive you? And do not the texts I have mentioned, with a thousand others of the same import, warrant the inference—that you “come” to Christ, because the Father hath given you to Christ, and draws you to him; that He “draws you with loving-kindness, because he has loved you with an everlasting love;” and finally, that He will “never cast you out?” My dear friend, I would not, indeed I would not, flatter you with a false hope. I know of nothing so melancholy as the way in which the world say—“Peace, peace; to themselves, when there is no peace”¹—no rational ground of hope. But the hope of a soul convinced of sin, renouncing all trust in its own righteousness, and casting itself on the mercy of Jesus, cannot be a vain or presumptuous hope; because it is founded on the word of God. You say, you feel so wicked and so worthless, that you dare not hope. Now till you felt yourself to be both exceedingly wicked and worthless, you could not be a fit object of Christ’s grace, who says, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”² I know that many, when they first come to a sense of their own sinfulness, think something in this way: ‘Christ will never receive so vile a sinner as I am: I must repent, and pray, and try to make myself a little better; and then perhaps I may deserve his favor.’ Alas! they know not that repentance and prayer are his free gifts, and instead of praying for the pardon we receive, are themselves a part of it. Would it not have been as reasonable for the leper to have waited, till he could cleanse himself from his leprosy; the blind man, until his sight was improved: or the sick of the palsy, till he could take up his bed and walk, before they would come to Jesus to be healed? The first chapter of Romans, from the 18th to the 32nd verse, gives an awful description of the state of every man’s heart by nature; and though education and the restraints of civilized society have prevented the breaking out of sin in the dreadful and open way in which it was indulged among the heathen, still I think every person awakened to a sense of sin, will perceive in it, as in a glass, their own image: at least they will acknowledge, that the seed of every sin is in their heart, especially that most unnatural and truly diabolical sin, of “worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator.” And lest we should imagine that living in a country where God is known, and joining in acts of outward religion, can make the heart really better, till it is converted to God; the Apostle goes on, in the second and third chapters, to prove that the Jew is no better than the Gentile; that “there is no difference; every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.” And it is immediately after having given us such an awful

¹ Jer. vi. 14.

² Matt. ix. 12, 13.

view of our state, in the sight of God, that he goes on to hold out free and unconditional salvation, to all who simply trust in the death and righteousness of Christ. But I doubt not, you will soon perceive, to your comfort, how very free the offers of grace in the Gospel are. I cannot forbear mentioning one more instance; it is in the parable of the two debtors, in the seventh of Luke—"And when they had *nothing to pay*, he *frankly forgave* them all." It is when we are brought to this feeling, that we "have nothing to pay," that our hearts are in a fit state to receive with eagerness and delight the "frank forgiveness" of our Saviour; then we give Him all the glory of it. Surely you and I feel ourselves to be in the situation of the debtors who owed most. We have nothing to pay; and sometimes I think I can even rejoice in this extremity of poverty, since it hides pride and boasting from me, and makes the mercy of God appear so divinely infinite. I do not know, that you have any reason for fancying that you shall die young: but though the thoughts of death are useful to all, and delightful to those whose sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake, I think we ought rather to be willing to live as long as our heavenly Father pleases, in hopes of being the means of bringing others to Him.

'I am glad you like your pupils so much. I feel incompetent to give you any advice about them: I believe the great thing is to pray much for them, that they may have that grace, which alone can make the Sabbath a delight. We should also pray with them, and let them see that we are very anxious about their salvation, and that, though we attach much importance to their progress in other things, we look upon them all as nothing in comparison with the knowledge of Christ. Children sometimes take much pleasure in answering a few simple questions on a chapter they have read; and in this way very little children may be made to comprehend a great deal. Many of the parables, types, and emblems in Scripture are particularly adapted to their capacities, and afford them great delight. I have seen a little child, who would have been tired to death with a serious discourse, listen for a long time with unwearied attention, whilst being told in its own childish language, how Christ compared himself to a vine, and his people to living branches; or how Christ as the good Shepherd, "gathers the lambs with His arms, and carries them in His bosom."¹ While explaining these things, they should be taught the text or texts referred to; that so a portion of God's own word may be fixed in their hearts. I think, however, there is nothing more important than to stop as soon as the attention of our little hearers seems to tire. Sometimes the eldest may be set to teach the youngest some verse or hymn. Scripture prints also form a very good resource for Sunday employment. Children are so artless, that we can soon perceive what pleases them most; and whatever kind of religious conversation or

¹ John xv. 1—5. Isaiah xl. 11.

employment seems particularly to interest them, should be brought out on Sunday, to make it as pleasant a day as possible to them.¹

‘I hardly know how to say a word against Jeremy Taylor; he is a great favorite of mine; but I cannot help thinking that his views of the doctrines of Christianity savor too much of monastic severity, and too little of the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus. The times he wrote in may account for these inconsistencies in the writings of so holy a man; but I think they are calculated to increase the melancholy of any one who is unhappy about religion; because there is something so obscure and confused in his ideas upon many important points. I must now, my dear —, bid you farewell; I need not tell you what pleasure it gives me to hear from you; nor how earnestly I wish that you may find the peace and comfort you are seeking. My earnest prayer is that the promised “Spirit of truth” may be with you, to “guide you into all truth.” The weaknesses you own to me are exactly what I have felt, and do feel myself; but God will overcome them for us, and enable us to “bring every thought into subjection to the obedience of Christ.” I am sometimes afraid that my using so much Scripture language may appear like cant or affectation to you; but I do it, because, when I express myself in the sense, and as much as possible in the words, of Scripture, I have less fear of misleading you, or of mixing my own earthly ideas with the pure and heavenly truths on which we are conversing.’

Again—

‘Stoke, Jan. 22, 1827.

‘Though I have not yet heard of you, I am sure that all things are going on well with you, since the very God of love is become your God, and will be your Father and guide forever. May you know more and more every day of His forgiving love, and be led to feel that you are with Jesus, “who has loved you, and washed you

¹ On this subject, so embarrassing to many anxious parents, the writer is tempted to transcribe the sentiments of a Christian mother, to whose wisdom, tenderness, discipline, and prayers, he will feel deeply indebted to the end of his days. ‘With respect to children’s early distinguishing the Sabbath from other days,’ as Mrs. Barbauld says on another occasion, ‘I think a child should never remember the first time he heard of God,—so it should be with regard to the Sabbath. The remembrance of it may be drawn in almost with the native nutriment, such as by attention to the church bells, the removal of playthings, of mamma’s work-box, &c. Little H—, at five years old, of course is beyond all this, and must be talked to in a way which she will understand, and with a determination that the subject should be regarded according to the will of God, not yielding to anything for which she may contend with you. As to little — (not quite two years old,) if he makes sport of pictures, they must be sparingly used. But yet he will soon understand that he must be grave, or he will not have them; and he will learn in time to make observations upon them, which will lead to restraint, especially if he sees his sister’s employment under discipline. A pencil perhaps may be allowed him to try to make letters, or to see a church drawn, as it is God’s house. The reason of the restraint, and the importance of the distinction of days, will soon be seen. Meanwhile, habit must be the child’s teacher. If he cannot discern a serious amusement from a common one, the weekly revolution of the Sabbath will mark a difference. The wrong names which he may give to things is of little moment, provided the distinction in the things is clear and marked.’

from your sins in His own blood!" O my dear friend, my heart is full of joy, when I think that the Lord has taught you to seek happiness in Him. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness"—says this precious Saviour—"for they shall be filled."¹ Therefore from his own words I have a warrant to call you "blessed;" and if He has given you himself, I care not what else He takes from you: knowing, as I do, that you can want nothing that is good for you, while the Lord of life and glory is yours. What a blessed prospect lies before you! The same Spirit that has been showing you the vanity and sinfulness of your own heart, will not stop short there. No; He will "guide you into all truth; He will take of the things of Christ, and show them unto you;" He will "shed abroad the love of God in your heart;" He will, in His own time, "fill you with joy and peace in believing;" He will bring you on "from strength to strength," and "from glory to glory," till at length He removes you hence, to that heaven where you shall see Christ as He is, be like him, and dwell with Him forever.² Now you have nothing to do but to live upon the fulness of Jesus, casting away your own righteousness, which is no better than filthy rags; your own strength, which is mere weakness; and your own wisdom, which is foolishness with God. You must put forth the hand of faith, and lay hold of the righteousness of Jesus, which he offers you as His free gift, Rom. v. 15, 21—His strength, which is sufficient for you. 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. Ephes. vi. 10. Phil. iv. 13. 1 John iv. 4—and His wisdom, which is also freely yours for Christ's sake. 1 Cor. i. 30. Only go on asking Him for more, more still, more of his precious love. He cannot deny it you; for He has said, "that whatsoever ye shall ask in His name, He will give it you."³ You cannot ask too much; for think of the great things the Apostle asked, Ephes. iii. 14—19; yet He concludes all by saying, "Unto Him that *is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.*" Dear ——, is not ours a happy lot? "If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? *It is Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us.*"⁴ Here is our anchor of hope—Christ died; Christ is risen; Christ intercedes. When Satan or our own evil conscience accuses us, we are too apt to look for comfort to something in ourselves. In this we shall always be disappointed; if we look to Christ, we never shall. May He teach us by His own Spirit how to live by faith in Him! I long to hear from you, and to know whether you have yet been able to find peace in God. This precious gift will, I know, be bestowed upon you. Do tell me all you feel, and let me often have a letter from you; for, believe me, scarcely anything can afford me greater pleasure.

¹ Matthew v. 6.

² John xvi. 13—15. Rom. v. 5; xv. 13. Psalm lxxxiv. 7. 2 Cor. iii. 18. 1 John iii. 2.

³ John xiv. 13, 14.

⁴ Romans viii. 31—34.

‘I pray that your communications may always bring me the happy news, that you are more and more devoted to our dearest Lord, in whom may we, my dearest friend, become daily more united. There is a common friendship which is very delightful; but there is a communion of spirit peculiar to those who love the Lord Jesus; and this is what I trust He will grant to us; for it will last, when common friendship has been long withered by the hand of death. May you be blessed with every spiritual blessing, and rooted and grounded *in love!* This is the prayer of, &c.’

The next letter exhibits accurate discrimination, and a high standard of Christian experience.

‘I was much interested, my dearest friend, in what you said about mingling earthly with heavenly feelings. It is a difficult question; and one which I am sure I am not fit to answer. Only I think we may in some degree know whether our love is of the right kind or not, by asking ourselves whether it really is God that we love in our friends, and in our communion with them; whether we love those that are in Christ incomparably more than those who are not in him; and whether after all we could give up the society of the very best and dearest of them all, rather than lose one particle of God’s favor. Surely we may love our friends, and that most dearly, for God requires it of us; but then “he that loveth father or mother *more than Him* is not worthy of Him.” Love to our friends seems to be the purest earthly feeling: yet I think, if we find ourselves enjoying devotion in its social privileges, more than in personal communion with God, our devotion cannot have been altogether of a spiritual character. But while we lament over the weakness and inconsistency, which spoil our holiest actions, and defile the sweetest affections God has given us, let us take comfort in the thought, “that we have not an high-priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” “He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust;”² and (what should raise our gratitude to the highest pitch) he himself has been made dust, like unto our miserable dust in all things, except sin, on purpose that he might be able to “have compassion on the ignorant, and on those who are out of the way.” There is such a clear view given to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews of the twofold nature of the Lord Jesus, that I derive unspeakable comfort from studying it. Scarcely any book makes me see so clearly that he is the Lord God “dwelling in light inaccessible, whom no man hath seen or can see;” and yet that he is “bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh;” able to enter into my feelings, to pity my weaknesses, and to sympathize with me in my temptations. Oh, if we could but dwell upon the wonder more! it is the “wisdom of God, and the power of God.” “Angels desire to look into it;” “the spirits of the just” are forever learning more about it; and I know of nothing

¹ Matt. x. 37.

² Heb. iv. 15. Psalm ciii. 14.

so likely to make the souls of God's people here like those who are above, as the continual contemplation of this marvellous love of God, in manifesting himself in the flesh. Dear M——, how soon we shall see him face to face, "whom having not seen we love!" Let us seek to become intimately acquainted with him here. Let us be often conversing with him, and always near to him, that he may not have to say to us—"I never knew you." He will never say this to us; but our watchful enemy may in some dark hour suggest such a thing to us; and then how delightful to be able to refute such a suggestion, by the memory of all the intimate communion we have enjoyed with Jesus! to be able to appeal to this dearest friend himself, that so far from never having known him, we have known, desired, loved nothing else in comparison with him! Would that this were my case now! But I feel as far away from Jesus, as if he were quite a stranger to my soul. My heart seems bent to backslide; and I cannot help continually thinking of that bitter complaint of Job's—"Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me, when his candle shined upon my head, and when, by his light, I walked through darkness!"¹ Still I know that God "will heal my backsliding, and love me freely;"² for though I am changed, "He changes not."³ But how strange it is, that our hearts should ever be so alienated from God, after having once known how sweet it is to love him! Surely the character of long-suffering, so often given to God in the Scriptures, has never been manifested by any one in so many instances as to me. Let us not forget, dearest M——, to pray for one another, "that our hearts may be knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding;"⁴ that we may daily increase in the "knowledge of Him, whom to know is life eternal."

The interesting tone of Christian simplicity which the following letter breathes, is worthy of remark.

‘ August 4, 1825.

‘ You will perhaps be surprised to receive a letter so soon after my last. But I feel this morning an irresistible wish to write to you, to which I was moved whilst praying for you; and in the strength of Jesus I will speak to you only of him. Perhaps I shall to-day receive a letter from you: I shall be very glad, because I am so anxious to know that you have devoted yourself in the fullest manner to Him, who gave up his life for you. My dear ——, I do not know whether you are feeling with me; but it is a cheering hope to me, that I, who have so often encouraged you in the greatest sin which a redeemed soul can commit, that of indifference to the service and love of the Redeemer, may now be an instrument

¹ Job xxix. 2, 3.

³ Mal. iii. 6.

² Hos. xiv. 4.

⁴ Col. ii. 2.

in His hands to animate you to very different feelings. We have given way to a very unfaithful spirit in our fears, and in our repugnance to speak in His name. Let us only believe, that when he grants us the inestimable privilege of carrying the blessed news of His Gospel—"it is not we that speak, but the Spirit of our Father which speaketh in us."¹ This feeling that we are nothing, but that He is everything in us, would give us a confidence full of joy, and at the same time without pride. It is indeed the height of happiness to follow him like a little child, to live in Christ, and out of ourselves. Oh, had I but a constant sight of his love! but he "is faithful, who will stablish us, and keep us from evil."² Let us confide in Him; let us tell him that we are not able to move a single step towards Him, that we cannot love Him, nor believe in His name. His goodness will allure us, His power preserve us, His strength will be given us in exchange for our weakness, and we shall find an indescribable delight in being able to do all in Christ.³

To her cousin she writes in this affectionate and encouraging strain:—

‘ November 27, 1827.

‘Let me tell you, my dear friend, how sincerely and affectionately I sympathize with you in the feelings you express with regard to the most important of all subjects. My dearest cousin, go on seeking. There are pleasures, rivers of pleasures, whereof the true Christian drinks with unspeakable delight; and in His own time Jesus, the good Shepherd, will lead you to these fountains of living water. Already He, who "callesh His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out"⁴ from the world of sin, has called you by His own word, speaking to your soul. Do but be willing, as Levi, "to rise up, leave all, and follow Him;"⁵ and you will find that He will lead you in the pleasant and peaceful way. For every vain pleasure that He calls upon you to give up, He will give a thousand solid and real pleasures, which it hath not entered into the worldling's heart to conceive.⁶

The next letter, written to her cousin, marks the instruction, obligation, and encouragement connected with the hour of "trouble,"—that time "to which man is born,"⁷ and when to the unhumiliated and un sanctified mind, the resources of the world often aggravate suffering, instead of contributing support.

‘ March 20, 1825.

‘Our meeting, my dear friend, must be deferred to a future time, if ever it takes place in this world. But there is another meeting, to which we may safely look forward, if we are the children of God through Christ Jesus: and this will be in the presence of our best

¹ Matt. x. 20.

⁴ Matt. ix. 9.

² 2 Thess. iii. 3.

⁵ Job v. 7.

³ John x. 3.

and dearest Friend, who so loved us, as to "purchase us with his own blood." How happy, how very happy it would make me, to know that my much-loved cousin was making it the grand object of her life to seek for salvation through the all-sufficient Saviour; and that we were united, not only by the strong ties of relationship and affection, but also by that bond of the Spirit, which makes all the redeemed people of Christ to be of one heart and one soul! Let us pray for this one thing, to be devoted to the Lord Jesus: it is a heaven begun on earth. The severe trial with which it has pleased our gracious God to afflict us,¹ has given us an additional reason to write vanity upon all human hopes and expectations: and I hope I may say, that it has driven us to seek for comfort in those things which alone can give any real relief to a mind under the pressure of grief. Painful indeed it is to speak about anything which brings with it such afflicting recollections. Yet I feel that I cannot, and must not leave it, till I have entreated you, my beloved friend, to join me in seeking a "friend that sticketh closer than a brother," whom no length of time, or adverse circumstances can take from us. Into his gracious ear we may pour all our complaints: "in all our afflictions he will be afflicted."² And one glimpse of his love will enable us to rejoice in the midst of tribulation. But there is one condition—"Give me thine heart."³ He must have all or none. A divided heart he will not accept. A heart that indulges in any one sin, that cleaves to any one worldly vanity, can never be the residence of His pure Spirit: he must have the whole heart, every thought, every faculty, every affection must centre in Him. And who is able to perform this condition? I am sure neither you nor I can; for we are carnal, and "the carnal heart is enmity against God."⁴ Well then, my dear —, let us simply believe on Him to effect all this for us. Let us come to Him as sinners; for "His blood cleanseth from all sin." Let us come as wretched, and poor, and blind; and He "will fill our minds with joy and peace in believing," will give us "gold tried in the fire, that we may be rich,"⁵ and will cause His Spirit to shine into our dark hearts, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."⁶ True, we cannot love Him of ourselves; but He can compel even our hearts to love Him. Oh may He reveal Himself to your soul, and give you such discoveries of His amazing love, as may constrain you to make Him your "all in all!"

In another letter, on the same subject, we find her taking her chair by the side of her afflicted friend, and, like a true daughter of consolation, "comforting her with the same comfort, wherewith she herself had been comforted of God."

¹ Probably alluding to the death of her only brother.

³ Prov. xxiii. 26.

⁵ Rev. iii. 18.

² Isaiah lxiii. 9.

⁴ Romans viii. 7.

⁶ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

‘ January 18th, 1828.

‘ MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,

‘ A letter from —, informed me of the very heavy trial you have sustained. I did not like immediately to intrude upon your feelings; and since then, illness has prevented my writing. How I have longed to be with you, and share your grief, though I am sensible of my inability to afford you any consolation! But I could at least have mingled my feelings with yours, and told you, what however you need not be told, that your losses and afflictions must ever be in a measure mine. My beloved friend, would that in partaking, as I most sincerely do, of your sorrow, I could in any way lighten or alleviate it! But I rejoice in the thought, that faith has united you to one, who is the God of comfort; and his Spirit is the Comforter. May he shed abundantly of his precious influence into your heart and your dear sister’s at this trying time! May he “lift up the light of his countenance upon you” both! and that will turn your mourning into gladness. Perhaps this bereavement will lead you nearer to Jesus: for we have an unfailing promise, that “all things shall work together for our good.” “Whom the Lord *loveth* he chasteneth, even as a father the son *in whom he delighteth*. *As many as I love*, I rebuke and chasten.”¹ And then how sweet to be assured, that “in all our afflictions he is afflicted!” that in all our troubles he is near to help; that in all our bereavements he is ready to fill up with himself the painful dreary void, which is made in our hearts! My beloved friend, I do not say these things to you “because you know them not, but rather because you know them,” and are, I trust, at this time living upon them. How vain were it to speak to you of earthly comfort under the heavy loss you have sustained! But this is the very time, when God’s children often drink deepest of heavenly consolation; and I trust it is thus with my precious friend. I know that our heavenly Father has afflicted you in very faithfulness; and though for the present your chastisement must seem “grievous” indeed to you, yet hereafter it shall bring forth in you “the peaceable fruits of righteousness.”² In the meantime may you be taught to lay hold on the gracious invitation to “call upon God in the time of trouble!” Make David’s words your own—“from the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.” “My soul trusteth in thee, and in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.” “In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee; *for thou wilt answer me*.”³ And may you, my dear friend, be able to apply to yourself the words of our God—“Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver: I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. I, even I, am he that comforteth you—as one whom his mother

¹ Romans viii. 28. Heb. xii. 6. Rev. iii. 19.

² Psalm cxix. 75. Hebrews xii. 11. ³ Psalm l. 15; lxi. 2; lvi. 3; lvii. 1; lxxvi. 7.

comforteth, so will I comfort you." "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee *for a moment*; but with *everlasting* kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."¹ I would not obtrude my own words upon you upon an occasion like this. But I may hope that the Spirit of truth will bless his words to your comfort; so I fear not to tire you with the repetition, for they are always new,—“O God, thou art my God.”² Here is a balm for every wound; yes, he is your God. Wisdom and tenderness shall form the basis of all his dealings towards you; and he, who is so wise and so tender, is engaged to do you nothing but good all the days of your life. I did not mean to have written so much, knowing that even the sympathy of friendship may sometimes be an interruption to our own feelings. But I now leave off, begging you to accept the warmest affection of, &c.’

How delightful is the confidence, which Miss Graham here expresses in the support of the simple word of God in the hour of affliction! Though her letter affords some of her own beautiful thoughts, yet her main effort is perceptible throughout; not to strain her mind to force out something original or striking, but to bring forward the encouraging promises of scripture, as far more powerful than the product of her own thought. *This is honoring the word of God.*

The next letter relates personally to herself, and gives a lively description of her state of mind, with a happy transition from her own playful spirit, to a more serious and edifying strain.

‘April, 1827.

‘I am sure that I am very old for my age. It is not common at twenty-four to live upon the past as I do. Most people would rather feed upon pleasant hopes of the future, but that is a thing I never do without trembling. It is not that I have the least doubt of everything being ordered for my happiness; but I dread passing my life in this painful uncertainty; and I think this requires more faith than to pass it in the most severe affliction. Besides, I am afraid of living in a kind of tertian fever: for either I am very hot or very cold. I am incapable of an equal temperament in anything. A person who knows me this month would not know me the next. I do not know myself; God knows me; he knows all my weaknesses, all my vanity: however, all this does not cause him to forsake me. When I stray, he seeks me; when I return, he receives me with tenderness; when I doubt, he assures me; when I am unhappy, he consoles me. Surely he can give me strength to devote myself wholly to him, and not to turn away again from his ways.’

Another letter affords a beautiful illustration of her spirituality of mind, connected with the recollection of her literary pursuits.

¹ Isaiah xlvi. 10; li. 12; lxvi. 12; liv. 7, 8.

² Psalm lxiii. 1.

Chudleigh, Sept. 1827.

‘You are then at —, where you lead a very pleasant life, but where you are not happy, because he who is your happiness no longer cheers you with his presence. I also am very gay. I am here to my heart’s content; and I am not happy, because I cannot find my God—my beloved. I find that we “are the salt of the earth;” but that this “salt has lost its savor, and is no longer good for anything, but to be thrown away and trodden under foot of men.”¹ But the infinite compassion of Jesus will not suffer it to be so with us, and therefore he causes us to feel incessantly bitter inquietudes, which will not suffer us to rest without returning to him. In the meantime we are both in a new place, which we shall perhaps never see again. Shall we quit this place without leaving there some savor of the name of Jesus Christ? It is delightful to be able to create recollections as exquisite as those awakened by the beautiful images of Petrarch and Tasso. But it is much more delightful to remember every place, where we have seen some soul converted to God; this recollection will solace us at a time, when all the delights of our Tasso will appear but a vain dream. I do not say this because I feel as I speak. I see it in my understanding; but it does not reach to my heart. However, I speak because I desire to feel it, and that you should feel it too. I wish to love Tasso, and our other studies, only for the love of God, and to give all to his service. But I love them too much for myself; and yet I do not think it would be right to give them up, since they may one day be of use to me.’

We will now present a few letters, which will introduce us to a nearer view of the exercises of her own mind. She appears to have been deeply harassed, in common with the great Apostle, with that painful conflict, which his own inspired pen has so graphically described in Romans vii.—a chapter which—though unintelligible to the world, and even to the merely external professors of the Gospel—unfolds more or less of the secret history of every Christian’s heart. The following letter, of an early date, marks her mind exercised in the painful sense of her own deficiencies, while anxiously engaged in the pursuit of that knowledge, which was the basis of all that was valuable, both in her intellectual and spiritual character.

June, 1823.

‘No—I have not yet regained my peace of mind. It is a guest which will not dwell in a soul so weak and vain as mine. I have again read a passage in Mason. But I find, that although self-knowledge is the most excellent kind of wisdom man can possess, yet there is a sort of self-knowledge, which only debases and hardens the soul; and this is exactly the kind with which I am furnished. And whilst true self-knowledge introduces order and

¹ Matthew v. 13.

light into the soul, as when the sun enlightens the earth; the self-knowledge which I possess rather resembles the lightning, which shines for a moment, and shows all the desolation which the storm has produced, and which itself increases the desolation. To know one's self miserable, but not to be unwilling to use the means of being happy; to know one's self a sinner, but to flee from and abandon the Saviour of sinners, has been a true description of my feelings.¹

To her cousin she expresses some grounds of thankful recollection for Christians, who are called in "the days of their youth" to the service of their God and Saviour.

'MY DEAREST —. I seem to have so much to say to you, that I scarcely know where to begin. I am not now afraid of indulging in a little effusion of my feelings to you, as they begin to sit less heavy upon my heart. I begin to feel a sort of assurance, that it will ere long be "with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shined upon my head." Yet I cannot tell you that I enjoy anything of really spiritual feeling. *Oh! that has been too long stifted to awake at once to anything like life and vigor.*¹ Dear —, let us be more careful than we have hitherto been, not to quench the spark of Divine life in our hearts, not to suffer the love of the world to enter where the Holy Spirit has deigned to erect a temple to himself. I must tell you the thought which struck me yesterday, and roused me more effectually than anything for some time past has done. It was a sense of the blessedness of being called in our youth to the knowledge of God, now that our feelings are fresh, and our habits unformed; before we have entered into the pleasures, company, and temptations of the world. It seems as though we had, through the mercy of our Saviour, being turned from the broad path of destruction while yet upon the threshold—before we could have a long and weary way of sin to retrace. Are not these mercies, which call for our warmest gratitude? Shall I tell you another light, which then struck me more forcibly than I had ever felt it before? Is it not a blessing to have been enabled to enter decidedly upon a life of religion, before we had formed any connection contrary to it? Now everything seems open before us. The narrow path has been for us divested

¹ The writer feels it right to notice this sentence as a subtle form of legality, very prevalent with young Christians, and not unknown to exercised Christians in a higher stage of maturity. The chastisement of the rod is indeed numbered among the rich provisions of the everlasting Covenant (Psalm lxxxix. 30—32); and usually the Lord makes the backslidings of his children the instruments of his salutary correction. (Jer. ii. 19.) But let us never seem to dictate to him the mode of his discipline; and especially let us not limit the absolute and unbounded freedom of the Gospel, which opens *the way of immediate and complete acceptance* to those who deserve a more protracted banishment from his favor. The expectation of an indefinitely distant return paralyzes the present effort; while the freeness of mercy opens the door of instant hope for the most hopeless, (Isaiah xliii. 23—25,) and indeed induces the constraining motive to the first step of penitence. (Ibid. xlv. 22.)

of half its difficulties ; and great will be our sin and misery, if we walk not in it with a cheerful devoted resolve, that every future step may be for his glory, who first led us into it.'

The next letter displays the jealous though exquisite enjoyment of her sources of legitimate pleasure in the work of God.

‘*Hastings, July, 1823.*

‘I am no longer sad, unless a pleasure too profound for laughter or gayety can be called sadness. There are times when I feel unhappy, because I am so happy—because I can derive such exquisite enjoyment from objects which pass away in a moment, while the things of eternal duration make only a light and fleeting impression on my soul. I cannot, however, forbid myself from enjoying the delights, which here present themselves every minute to my mind ; and you must pardon me if I fatigue you with many absurdities.’

The following allusion to her early attainments cannot fail of interesting the reader.

‘There are periods in the life of every person, which have respect only to the intellect, but which affect, however, all the rest of the life, and to which may be traced up almost all the intellectual qualities which that person possesses. It appears to me, that the period to which my mind recurs with the greatest pleasure is that, when I began to learn Milton as a simple act of memory.¹ What a low and unworthy motive ! However, when my soul began to open, to understand a little his noble ideas, so entire a change was made in my inclinations and taste, that I can hardly believe myself to be the same person.’

The next letter gives a profitable application of Scripture, together with an interesting train of remark.

‘*June, 1823.*

‘One text of Scripture has lately dwelt much upon my mind, and seemed like a sentence of condemnation upon my worldly-mindedness and inconsistency. It is that short but expressive description of the conversion from sin—“And he rose up, *and left all*, and followed him.”² Oh ! what a warning—and yet by me unheeded warning—does it seem to rise and shake off these fetters of sloth and inactivity—to leave all, even the dearest friends, the most deep-rooted habits, which can come in the way of this grand end, and to follow Jesus through affliction and difficulties, in all the meek simplicity and lowly dependence of a little child ! May he give us strength thus to follow his loved steps ! May he enable us to walk hand in hand, mutually encouraging and supporting each other,

¹ See page 12.

² Luke v. 28.

till we come to the presence of his glory, there to abide forever ! I well know the feeling you mention with regard to another world. But when thinking of this, I am unfortunately apt to reverse it, and to consider the past as a painful dream, and the present as something too disagreeable to be real ; while I look forward to future hopes and schemes till the dreams of my imagination assume the shape of delightful realities ; and in stretching forward to them, I forget, that it is only in the sober and continual routine of present duties, that I can hope to attain those delightful expectations.'

Her seasons of prayer appear to have been, in common with all Christians, times of severe conflict. The following extract, after alluding to the blots that too often deform the profession of the Gospel, adverts to this point.

'Torquay, April 12, 1825.

'How many ways there are of dishonoring the Christian profession ! some by ill humor ; some by coldness ; some by immoderate zeal ; others by the fear of man. Oh ! my dear friend, let us seek to ornament our profession ; let us see in the unlimited compassion of our good Shepherd, pardon for our past extreme lukewarmness, and Divine strength to shake off the drowsiness which oppresses us. Not only the prayers which I offer for myself, but those which I offer up for you, seem to be covered with a cloud through which they cannot penetrate. My prayers did I say ? I do not pray—I am frightened when I think of the state in which I am. If you are in a more spiritual frame, when at the feet of the Saviour, remember her who is gone so far away.'

To another of her correspondents she thus writes :

'April 30, 1827.

'I can hardly tell you what a strange state I am in—one minute longing after holiness so intensely, that I feel as if I should die if I did not get it : the next so full of vain thoughts, that I hardly know what real spiritual holiness is. I never had such clear views of the extreme depravity of my heart and life. Every day I learn something new about my helplessness and blindness, and dreadful wickedness. But though I can spread these things before God in prayer, I cannot mourn over them ; or if I do, it is from a sense of my misery—not from a view of Him whom I have pierced. Well ! I know this hardness of heart is a part of the complaint under which I groan, and which will be removed by the great Physician. But I am sometimes confounded by the seemingly contrary answers I receive to prayer, though in the end I feel the dealings of God with me to have been wise and just. For instance—after having prayed much for a sense of sin, I seem to have been left to the power of it. I feel left to strive with a great enemy, who tramples me with the greatest ease under his feet. Let me not un-

justly murmur against my dearest and wisest Saviour. For he leaves me not long at the mercy of my cruel adversary, but appears on my behalf often when I have the least expectation of it. One thing distresses me very much. It is so strange. I have for some time past scarcely ever enjoyed a spiritual sabbath. I often enjoy a sabbath on week-days; but when Sunday comes (I mean the last three or four,) all my spiritual feelings go; religion seems the duller thing in the world, and vain thoughts the pleasantest; I cannot tell you how the comfort of the day is destroyed. It was the case the whole of yesterday till quite night, when the accidental opening upon this little verse of 'Poplady's brought back the loveliness of Christ to my thoughts with such sweetness, and filled me with such longings after Him, that for some time I could not sleep:

Less than thyself will not suffice,
My comfort to restore;
More than thyself I cannot crave,
And thou canst give no more.

Oh, to be "filled with all the fulness of God!" to have "Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith!" to be temples of the Holy Ghost! To know that this is mine; and yet for want of faith I so often make my heart as a cage of unclean birds. My dearest friend, I have chosen this verse for my portion, my treasure in this world and the next. I recommend it to you; and I know God will give it to us, and abundantly fulfil our wishes above all that we can ask or think—Ezek. xlv. 28. What a glorious portion! Hard as my heart is, and blind as my eyes are, I see and feel a little of its excellence: but then so often my soul forgets her joy, looks back upon the world, and shrinks from the choice, which a few minutes before seemed so unutterably desirable!

At another time she writes in the same strain.

‘*May 15, 1827.*

‘I think I would give up every prospect of worldly happiness that I have, or ever can have, to have these vain thoughts crucified and nailed to the cross of Jesus; and yet often, the more I want to be delivered from them, the more obstinately I cleave to them, and I am so soon tired of praying against them. But the everlasting covenant fills me with hope and comfort—"I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts."¹

The next letter shortly afterwards is of a similar character. The spirit of tender carefulness that marks the closing allusion is worthy of special remark.

¹ Jer. xxxii. 40; xxxi. 33.

‘Stoke, June 2, 1827.

‘I never wanted something to awaken and alarm me so much as I do now. I think I could be content to have some very great affliction, if it would but restore me to communion with God. I told you how much vain thoughts had tempted and annoyed me. When I last wrote to you, I felt confident of being soon made more “than conqueror through him that loved me.” But I have lately left off striving against them; and now having turned “the house of prayer into a den of thieves,” I know not how to cast them out again. Oh! that Jesus himself would drive them from his temple, though it be with a scourge.’ With regard to —, I feel it more and more my duty to send my letter. But what I have written has been given to me, and I am afraid to finish it, lest I should, in my worldly and unbelieving frame, mix something of my own with it.’

Yet her deep self-abasing apprehensions were not—except, possibly, at seasons of temptation—tinctured with despondency. From the tone of many of the preceding letters it is evident, that she knew the fulness of her resources in the promises of the Gospel: and in her prostrate humiliation of soul she did not cease to plead them to the uttermost of her warranted expectations. Thus she writes to a friend:

‘—, and I, and all took the sacrament yesterday. I never felt so much—‘the remembrance of these our misdoings is grievous; the burden of them is intolerable.’ Is it not great and free love, which has made that a burden to us, which was once our delight; and that intolerable, which we once drank up like water? But what puzzles and alarms me is, that it should be sometimes intolerable, and yet not forsaken; and sometimes at the moment when I feel it to be intolerable, the struggle to give it up is *more* intolerable. The only thing that makes me feel a *holy* hatred of sin, is the thought, that, even when it seems sweetest to me, the eye of Jesus beholds it as an evil and a bitter thing; and I shall soon look upon it as He does. It is “that abominable thing which He hates.”² It is that abominable thing which my wretched abominable heart loves. But then I do hate myself for loving it; and I do not know anything I would not thank God for depriving me of, if it would tend to make me see sin as He does. I know this is the way you feel. Then let us take comfort in the thought that Jesus has done something for us, and to us who have (though so little) more will be given. “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it;” this often gives me comfort, (as indeed the whole of the eighty-first Psalm does): but then we can no more open our mouths, than we can fill them. God must open them wide, and fill them too. I feel so much comfort in thinking that we cannot open our mouths too wide; we cannot be too greedy of heavenly

¹ John ii. 15.

² Jer. xlv. 4.

food, nor too grasping of heavenly riches. It is not presumption, but faith and humility, to expect that God for Christ's sake will fill our earthen vessels with an eminent measure of his heavenly treasures; and the greatest eminence in Christian grace is to lose sight of self, to be willing to be least of all—to be nothing, and to look upon others as nothing, except as they are in Christ, and to look upon Christ as everything. But oh, how far am I from this! Yet I do not despair. I have had glimpses of it. I trust it shall one day be the settled temper of both our souls. Pray for me, and pray that I may be enabled to pray for you.'

The darkness and conflicts of her mind, were doubtless much increased by the active power of the enemy operating upon her enervated health. It is delightful, however, to mark the cheering irradiations of sunshine breaking in upon her, as marked in the following letter :

' November 21, 1826.

MY BELOVED FRIEND,

'I can almost say in the words of Scripture, which you love, that the winter of my soul is gone, and that the sweet season of the springing of flowers, and of singing of birds is come, and that the voice of the celestial dove makes itself heard.¹ I again begin to know what it is to walk, "as seeing Him who is invisible." But do not suppose that I am in a very spiritual state. But the least ray of the light of his countenance appears immense, after so many weeks passed in darkness and rebellion. Oh! my —, let us exert every effort to find again the lover and the beloved of our souls. Who knows but his own time may come, in which he will fully reveal himself to us? Let us pray for each other, that we may be wholly separated from the world and from ourselves, and more closely united to Jesus, in whose strength we shall be able to do all things. I cannot feel that deep repentance that I ought to feel for my repeated transgressions. But even in this I see the Divine love, because every strong emotion affects my health.'

Her views of the power of faith in prayer were most enlivening. 'I never pray,'—said she one day to a dear friend—'without a promise.' On that promise she was enabled to rely with entire confidence. Referring to the fulness and power of the Apostle's prayer, Eph. i. 17, 18, and to that sublime doxology, chap. iii. 20, 21,—she added, 'What a prayer was this! How comprehensive! How much are we encouraged to ask for! Why then do we receive so little, but because our hearts are not sufficiently enlarged? We are wanting *in faith*. We do not expect enough from God. We are straitened in ourselves. We are not straitened in God. How much more should we receive, if we "continued instant in prayer,"

¹ See Cant. ii. 11, 12.

and "prayed without ceasing." We are like the King of Israel, who, when commanded by Elisha to smite on the ground, provoked the wrath of the man of God, by *smiting only thrice, and then staying*. Whereas, had he smitten five or six times, he would not only have gained a temporary advantage over his enemies, but would have utterly destroyed them.¹ Thus in our prayers we are contented *with small success*. We do not continue enough in the exercise. Even when our hearts have been *somewhat enlarged*, we have been too ready to desist, and rest satisfied without persevering till we have received yet larger supplies of Divine grace.

To another friend she wrote in the same enlarged spirit of Christian expectancy:—

‘*May 15, 1827.*

‘I see something of the love of Christ, which I would not lose for worlds. But neither do you or I see half what may be seen of it even in this world, *if we ask in faith*. Only let us not be afraid of expecting too much. Let us stretch our prayers and expectations to the very uttermost of what "we can ask or think;" and as sure as God is truth, we shall receive "exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think."² We shall receive all that Jesus can ask or think.’

Her views of Christian assurance, as set forth in the following letter, were clear and scriptural.

‘*July 4, 1827.*

‘My mind is in a state of declension and deadness to spiritual things, which is the more awful to me, from having enjoyed much communion with God, a few weeks ago. I know not how to describe this state better than by saying, that prayer seems to be my burden; and evil thoughts my element; and that, instead of maintaining a continued conflict against this inclination, I feel a kind of obstinate hardened disposition in my mind, leading me to yield rather to Satan than to God. But even during all this time, my evidence of being a child of God, though not brought with any realizing sweetness to my heart, yet remains quite clear and unclouded to my understanding. But my evidence is this—not that I am now in a spiritual frame of mind (though that would be a delightful confirmation of it)—but that—let my state be what it will,—still I cannot forget, that I have cast myself a thousand and a thousand times upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. I have committed my soul to him; and, though I am unfaithful and unbelieving, yet I know that he abideth ever faithful, to keep that which has once been committed to him. Besides—I have told him

¹ 2 Kings xiii. 14—19.

² Eph. iii. 02.

again and again—and *that* with agonizing earnestness,—what a weak backsliding heart I have intrusted to his care; and that, if he does not hold me up, I shall fall. And how can I think that he has forgotten all my prayer for keeping, and all his promises of keeping me, and that he means to let me fall forever? Oh! I cannot think so. I cling to my assurance, and cannot but think, that as Christ—and *Christ alone*—is the foundation of it, it must be well-founded. I must think (I would say it with reverence) that God would cease to be “a faithful Creator,”¹ if he could give up a soul that has been so often confided to his keeping. There is one verse, that in the darkest and coldest seasons comes with comfort to my mind. I know that I have often asked my heavenly Father for bread. Shall I think he has given me a stone?² I have asked him for the Spirit of truth. Shall I think he has put me off with the spirit of delusion?

This letter illustrates the true character of Christian confidence, as exclusively based upon the word of God. It is independent of external excitement. It is the reliance of faith upon the immutable engagements of Divine faithfulness. Much that passes under this name is the assurance of feeling, rather than of faith. The consolations of the Gospel *are believed, not because they are declared, but because they are felt*. Hence, when the comfort is lost, the ground of confidence is destroyed. This, however, is an inversion of the scriptural rule—walking by sight, not by faith³—unlike a tried saint of old, who when “walking in darkness, and having no light,” had learnt to “stay himself upon his God”—“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”⁴

Any encouragement, however, to be drawn from a past operation of faith must be carefully connected with its present exercise. Its first effort indeed linked the Christian’s heart in indissoluble union with his Saviour. Yet the principle must not be confined to a single act, by which at some former time *he came* to Christ. It is rather the continued habit of the soul, by which *he is “coming”*⁵ to Christ in constant motion. In Miss Graham’s case, the earnestness and intensity of her mind clearly marked the active though unconscious influence of the habit of faith, even while her recollection was fixed—perhaps too exclusively—upon some former and determinate exercise.

But was Miss Graham warranted in her strong assurance, in a state of conscious and acknowledged backsliding? When we consider the character of her religion—self-suspicious, jealous of declension, earnestly longing for communion with God, content with no *ordinary* measure of conformity to the Divine image, we shall not be disposed to accuse her of presumption, or of a loose and careless profession. Hers was not a paralyzing security—a self-indulgent

¹ 1 Peter iv. 19.

⁴ Isa. i. 10. Job xiii. 15.

² Luke xi. 11—13.

⁵ 1 Peter ii. 4. Comp. Gal. ii. 20.

³ 2 Cor. v. 7.

repose—but an habitual quickness of spiritual discernment, and dutiful watchfulness. It was probably her intense solicitude for higher conformity to her Lord, that induced her, like holy Bradford, to pass this severe judgment upon herself, in the deep consciousness of her infinite distance from the ultimate point of attainment, and her sometimes apparent contrariety to it. Iniquity felt and iniquity allowed, are, however, essentially different. When allowed, the soul is benumbed and blinded in comparative unconsciousness. When hated, the sensibility of its defilements is so keen, and the apprehensions of its guilt so afflicting, that even in a state of conscious acceptance, the soul is constrained to “write bitter things” against itself. The prostrate humiliating confessions of that holy saint of the Reformation just alluded to, in no degree hindered the peaceful rest of his soul upon the engagements of the faithfulness and love of his God.

We could not indeed but strongly discountenance an assured confidence in a state of open sin, or in any habitually allowed inconsistency with a Christian profession. Yet we are persuaded that a personal assurance has often proved the only chain of love, that has restrained the backslider from total apostasy—from saying, “There is no hope—for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.”¹ Often, too, has it been the appointed means of conviction and recovery from backsliding. A realized sense of a Father’s love, in the tenderness and wisdom of merited chastening, has pierced many a rebellious child with contrite sorrow, and has brought him back to his Father’s feet with simplicity, gratitude, and confidence. While humbled under the most distressing consciousness of backsliding, he is yet encouraged by the remembrance, that the principle and warrant of assurance is not in himself, and that his ground of confidence is unchangeably the same. ‘I see,’ said Miss Graham on one occasion, ‘that God is my God in covenant. He is unchangeable though I continually vary.’

The duty and importance of an elevated enjoyment of scriptural privilege, are delightfully inculcated in the following letter:—

‘What a privilege,’ she observes, (speaking of a blessed saint now in heaven) has Mrs. —! to be walking so closely with God, and enjoying so much of his presence. “Oh! that I” thus always “knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!” But I never had so little of his presence as now, and if it sometimes returns for a moment, the emotions of my mind seem almost more than I can bear, so that I dread, even while I long for, their recurrence. The true remedy for all this would be, that settled quiet peace, which is the effect of the righteousness of Christ. But this I want faith to lay hold of as my own. I have been surprised lately at the slighting and almost suspicion, with which friends appear to look upon spiritual peace and joy, as if it were

¹ Jer. ii. 25.

rather a snare to be guarded against, than a privilege to be sought after. Yet surely—"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice,"¹—is as much a command as—"Thou shalt not kill—Thou shalt not steal." And I know nothing except this "joy of the Lord," which is said to be "our strength,"² that can so *fill* the heart, as to leave no room for rejoicing in self or in the world. And do you not think, that the more of this holy joy is "shed abroad in the heart," the more godly sorrow will dwell there? At least I find it to be so. They seem to me to be inseparable companions in our experience on earth. Were I to mention the sweetest ingredient in the cup of joy or sorrow (I scarcely know which to call it) that we are permitted to taste here; it would be the melting of the heart, springing from the sense of that immeasurable unworthiness, which gives us some faint conception how low Christ has stooped to save us! Why then, should it be thought presumptuous to desire an abundant measure of the very thing which we are commanded to have? Why should this desire for "this peace of God which passeth all understanding," be construed into a dependence upon frames and feelings?

' Sometimes I think we might have almost as much joy as there is in heaven, if we had but a holy boldness to ask for it, and to receive. We are not straitened in Christ; "but we are straitened in our own bowels;" so that, because joy is an undeserved guest in a heart defiled by sin, we dare not receive it as a lawful guest, though this heart has been cleansed with the blood of Jesus. But what will it be, my dearest friend, to open our eyes upon *that* world, where "perfect love casteth out fear"³ forever? I try to conceive it sometimes, but I cannot. There is nothing I find so difficult, as to imagine entire deliverance from the spirit of bondage. What will it be, to be "face to face" with Christ; "to see him as he is;"⁴ to "see the King in his beauty,"⁵ in "His own glory, in his Father's glory;" and yet to look upon him without fear! We had need have these earthly tabernacles taken down first; as they never could sustain it. And yet this is that death, at which even renewed human nature shrinks; though, if we could view it aright, it is but the shutting out of fear, and the letting in of perfect love forever.'

It is indeed to be feared, as Miss Graham has observed, that there is a class of professors among us, who depreciate the glowing exercises of Christian feeling. Their religion is rather of an intellectual, than of a spiritual character. They reason, explain, demonstrate, vindicate. But they are cautious of extremes. They realize the seriousness, importance, and restraints of the Gospel, rather than its high privileges and constraining obligations. The exercise of their judgments, from this defect of a *deep* influence of

¹ Phil. iv. 4. ¹ Thess. v. 16.

⁴ Ibid. iii. 2. Rev. xxii. 4.

² Neh. viii. 10.

⁵ Isa. xxxiii. 17.

³ 1 John iv. 18

spiritual religion, materially checks the healthful and animating glow of their affections. Their views of the fundamental doctrines are generally orthodox, and they maintain a correct external deportment. But they appear to have a scanty enjoyment of that new-created taste and element of pleasure, which is connected with the revelation of the glory of God in the soul. They seem to be little conversant with the varied exercises of a devotional habit of mind—such as holy delight in communion with God, lively contemplation of the Saviour, spiritual meditation and enjoyment of the sacred word, and heavenly aspiration of soul. Their ordinary conversation on religion is restrained from that intimate and free communication on spiritual sympathies, which infuses mutual warmth, refreshment, and energy in the endeavor, like Jonathan and David, to “strengthen each other’s hands in God;”¹ to unite in a closer intercourse with our Divine Saviour, and to invigorate our purposes of consecration to his service.

Such persons seem too little to consider the strong and important connection of religion with the affections. But it is only their lively and powerful exercise, that is at all proportioned to the vast expanse and grandeur of the subject. We find, therefore, that religion in heaven, where it exists in its most refined purity and perfection, is much engaged in the delightful affections of joy and love, and in the fervent expressions of these feelings in everlasting praise. The scriptural exhibition of religion also, in the records of the most eminent servants of God, and in the rich display of the promises of Christ, is of the same glowing character.

The religion of the “man after God’s heart” was a religion of the affections. Every natural affection of his soul was filled with God. In his book of Psalms, written with the pen of inspiration for the public use of the church, we behold him—not describing the proper individualities of his own experience; but leading the worship of the universal church in the expression of deep humiliation, holy admiration, fervent love and joy in his God, earnest thirstings and pantings for his presence, delight in his ordinances, devout acknowledgments for his unbounded mercy, and exulting triumph in his faithful love. The book of Canticles also—however we may refrain from a minute consideration of some of its imagery—exhibits those vigorous exercises of spiritual affections, which are consonant to the experience of the lively Christian, and which excite in him no common measure of admiring, trusting, and grateful love to his Divine Saviour. The corresponding New Testament development of our privileges embraces those high and heavenly blessings, which draw out the affections of the soul into exciting employment—such as “peace with God;” constant “access” to his presence and favor; “rejoicing in hope of his glory; glorying in tribulations,” as the pathway thither; “the love of God shed abroad in the heart;” and “the enjoyment of God through our Lord Jesus

¹ 1 Sam. xxiii. 16.

Christ ;" all of which are presented to us in a single view, as our present portion and source of happiness.¹

If, therefore, we acknowledge the Gospel in its faith and obligations, while defectively apprehending and estimating its privileges— if our judgment has been informed and established without a full and habitual exercise of the affections, we stand convicted of an imperfect reception of Christ, and of realizing only a partial interest in his unspeakably rich enjoyments. The class of professors, to whom we more immediately allude, are little aware of the extent of loss to their own souls, or of evil to the church, from their neglect of seating religion more deeply and powerfully in their affections. The spiritual tone of their religion is materially deteriorated. The refreshing influence of the ordinances is weakened. The Holy Comforter is restrained in his intimate communion with their souls. A want of tender sensibility for the most part characterizes their profession. The careless but discerning world mark no perceptible elevation of heavenly character, and are led to think that the promised privileges of the Gospel are a delusive paradise. And professors of their own class gladly take shelter under this lower standard of the cross, as a respectable evangelical religion, precluding them from many inconvenient sacrifices, to which a more decided exhibition of Christian devotedness might have subjected them.

This restraint upon the affections brings us therefore into a lower atmosphere of the Gospel, unvisited with *the full power* of its holy influence. This may readily account for that conformity to the principles, habits, and conversation of the world, which to a considerable extent is connected with an evangelical profession. The enlivening power of faith, *operating through the medium of the affections*, would secure a triumphant victory in every form of worldly conflict,² and enable the disciples now, as in times past, boldly to confess their Master's name,³ to glory in his cross,⁴ and to delight in his service.⁵ But this is the "one thing" that is too often "lacking : " and for which, as a principle of entire consecration to Christ, no substitute can be found.

Let us not, however, while insisting upon the connection of the Gospel with the affections, be supposed to advocate a religion of impulse or sensation. We are aware that excited feelings are no proof of holy affections. Much that passes under the name of religious feeling, is the ebb and flow of the animal emotions, wholly unconnected with a spiritual principle. Those emotions alone are of Divine origin, on which practical holiness is ingrafted ; and which are not sought for the pleasurable excitement of the moment, but as a medium for the exercise of heavenly affections, and for the exhibition of self-denying obedience. We remember also, that the first excitement of a religious feeling is very different from that feeling, as a fixed habit of the mind under the control of a sound judgment. The example of the primitive Christians leads us to combine intelli-

¹ Rom. v. 1—5, 11.

² John v. 4, 5.

³ Acts iv. 19, 20.

⁴ Gal. vi. 14.

⁵ Acts xx. 24 ; xxii. 13.

gence and energy with feeling, and therefore to suspect the most delightful emotions, which do not bring the steady light from heaven into the daily path, which do not communicate vigor, activity, and decision to the character, and that are not connected with a dedication of the whole man to the service of God. Religion is the dominant practical principle in the soul; and its practical results are the legitimate evidence of the genuineness of the principle. Any encouragement from the past exercise of the affections, *irrespective of their present practical influence*, must therefore be discountenanced: and even this influence satisfactorily ascertained must be controlled by the dictates of a *spiritually enlightened* judgment. We would call the judgment into constant exercise, under the influence of Christian motives. We would regulate "the spirit of love" under the control of "the spirit of a sound mind."¹ We would have "love" always to "abound in knowledge and in all judgment." Only let it "*abound yet more and more.*"² Let it not be chilled, damped, fettered. Let us guard against that frosty elevation of intellect, which seems to regard religion as an Alpine plant, the growth only of a cold climate. Let us not separate it from that exciting glow of love, in which we are quickened to a sense of our obligations, sustained under our daily trials, and are raised in our present privileges and prospective anticipations above the baneful influence of "the course" and spirit "of this world."³

Constitutional causes must, however, be well considered, while insisting upon the strong influence of religion upon the affections. Intellectual character is not always imbued with natural sensibilities; while on the other hand a sympathetic tone of character is easily excited. It is obvious that both these require larger measures of Divine influence—the one, that the man may enter into the delight of Christian feeling—the other, that natural tenderness may be braced up to firmness and stability: in both cases—that they may judge each other charitably. But "*the love of God must be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost,*"⁴ or we are not, we cannot be, Christians.

We would beg, however, shortly to advert to a depreciation of

¹ 2 Tim. i. 7.

² Phil. i. 9.

³ Miss Graham's view of scriptural sobriety, as distinguished from lukewarmness and enthusiasm, is most just and discriminating—"I do not mean," she observes in her manuscript, "by sobriety, a spirit of temporizing worldly prudence. I speak of that staid considerate frame of mind, which has its source in the full and calm assurance of the understanding—that maturity of judgment, which, without checking the fiery chariot of zeal, directs its course in the high road of consistency. Lukewarmness is, however, far more hateful than enthusiasm. The fault of the heart is more dangerous than the error of the head. Yet are the flights of enthusiasm most hurtful. Instead of displaying the fair countenance of religion, they present us with a distorted caricature of every feature. The world is ready enough to mistake this for her true likeness, and to ridicule her for what is not her own. "The offence of the cross" is already a sufficient stumbling-block in the way of the irreligious. We need not add to it the ill-judged singularity of our own conduct. If we walk closely with God, that will make us singular enough. We shall certainly be regarded as enthusiastic. In this solitary instance, let us not be what we seem. We are especially commanded to "be sober," to "add to our faith knowledge;" and the Spirit, who is our teacher and guide, is "the spirit of a sound mind." (1 Peter i. 13; iv. 7; v. 8. 2 Peter i. 5. 2 Tim. i. 7.)

⁴ Romans v. 5.

scriptural privilege of a very different character. There are some who stand even upon lower ground than intellectual professors. They are satisfied with a small portion of spiritual enjoyment, and even that this modicum should be occasional, not constant. They have no conception of any internal religion answering to the wrestling "violence," by which "the kingdom of heaven is taken by force."¹ The warmth of first impressions subsides as a matter of course; not however into a matured and solid effectiveness, but into lukewarmness and inertia. If they be the children of God in a Laodicean state, they will probably be roused by sharp afflictions, to a zealous and penitent profession of their Master's name, and by this wise and loving dispensation, they will be quickened to hear the voice of their Lord, and introduced into the full enjoyment of communion with him.² It is, however, evident, that every form of the indulgence of sloth, every allowance of unbelief, and the influence of obscure apprehension of the Gospel, operate prejudicially to the interests of the church and of true religion. For thus religion is presented to the world in a false and unattractive garb; the standard of holiness is lowered in the defect of that enlivening sense of redeeming love, which conciliates, engages, and captivates the heart; little is known of that support of the promises of God, which overbalances all difficulties, real and imaginary, and adds more to the enjoyment of life, than suffering can take away. This evil will be generally traced, except in cases of moral delinquency or constitutional weakness, to the secret root of self-righteousness. The simplicity of faith in the contemplation of its great object is obscured by an undue and unevangelical dependence upon evidences. These, *though they have their legitimate use as the confirmation of our hope,*³ *must have no connection with its foundation.* When the perception of clear evidence is deficient (as in times of temptation especially is often the case;) faith, leaning upon this ever-changing support, becomes uncertain, unsettled, and unfruitful. Whereas under the darkest destitution of internal sources of comfort, the offer, invitation, encouragement and promise of the Gospel, *addressed to sinners,* is an unfailing and sufficient warrant, such as nothing in ourselves can make more complete. Let, then, faith be distinctly and explicitly exercised. Let clear apprehensions of the ground of comfort be diligently sought. Let the testimony of the word, not the feelings of our heart, be the foundation of our hope. Let Christ be regarded as the only fountain of life, light, and consolation. Thus will "Grace and peace be multiplied unto us through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord."⁴

We close this section with giving at some length, and with interesting variety of illustration, Miss Graham's sentiments upon *Conformity to the World*—a subject of vital moment to the integrity, consistency, and fruitfulness of the Christian profession.

¹ Matt. xi. 12.

³ See the Epistle of St. John. See p. 98.

² See Rev. iii. 19, 20.

⁴ 2 Peter i. 2.

The first letter commences with a few remarks, not immediately relevant to the subject, but which will be read with interest.

‘ *Stoke, Feb. 21, 1827.*

‘ It seems to me that all the Lord’s dealings with his redeemed children speak this language—“Cease ye from man.”¹ Put not your trust in any earthly comforter. Lean not on any arm but the arm of your Beloved. “For the hearts of the people” of this world “are full of idols.” Self is the great idol, that is loved and honored more than God. Then comes a multitude of lesser things, all subservient to this one; and if some little corner in the heart is reserved for God, or if the shadow of a throne is set up, where He may sit on solemn occasions, at the pleasure of the great idol, then they think all is going on well, and God loved as much as he could reasonably expect to be loved by creatures, who have such a press of business on their hands. But, my beloved friend, we may not do so. God, who has purchased us for his own inheritance, will have our whole heart and our whole dependence; and though we must rejoice in the friends He gives us, yet we must not think we cannot do without them; or that we should go on better, if we had more of their help. Christ is all-sufficient, and teaches, comforts, and reproves in His own time and way, and by His own means, without any need of our direction. In looking back to every event of my life, since I have known something of the grace of God, I find that there never has been anything on which I very much depended, but God has straightway removed or imbittered that thing, or in some way made it useless to me, till I returned to place my whole dependence on Him. But let us not accuse our dearest Lord of acting unkindly towards us in sending these disappointments; for he only takes away other helps and props, to make room for himself. He loves us too well to suffer any rival in our affections.

‘ I have read your dear letter over and over, and scarcely know how to answer it, or what to make of it. Oh that you had some better counsellor than I! for I know not how to advise you. I fear lest you should think me strict and gloomy, if I tell you all I think; but I will tell you, since you desire it; and I know that God is both able and willing to give you joys so much superior to every worldly amusement, that you will wonder you could ever think them worth a thought. I must say then, that the world and worldly amusements, appear to me quite inconsistent with the character of a real Christian; and that we never can enjoy happy converse with God till we give them up. The Christian is described in the Scriptures, as “the temple of the living God.”² Now where the holy God takes up his abode, surely that heart must be sanctified and set apart from every common use, and wholly devoted to his service. But can God and the world reign in the same heart, or as it were reign by turns? Shall we admit the Lord of glory in the morning, and shut Him out in the evening, while we are going to a ball or a play?

¹ Isaiah ii. 22.

² 2 Cor. vi. 16.

for we may be well assured, He will not go with us there. The spirit of the world, which reigns in such places, is quite opposite to His Spirit; and "the friendship of the world," which is there sought, "is enmity with God."¹ I know this would be called uncharitable; but I do not wish to be more charitable than the Bible. And surely experience proves it to be true; for, go into any fashionable assembly whatever, and there begin to speak of those things of which we ought to talk, "when we are sitting in the house, and when we walk by the way, and when we lie down, and when we rise up;"² and see if politeness itself can suppress a smile at your strange and unwarrantable impertinence, in forcing the attention of the company to subjects, which they are met for the very purpose of forgetting. No, my dear friend, that cannot be a proper place for a Christian, where religion is the thing that must not be named; and where even something in our hearts will tell us, that such subjects are out of place. Neither can you say—your own heart may be as well employed there as elsewhere; for the most delightful meditation on heavenly things (if we could thus meditate in the midst of vanity) would be spoiled by the thought, that there were none who enjoyed like communion with ourselves; we should soon have to "seek, with Joseph, a place to weep in,"³ to weep over our companions and friends, who are thus "feeding on ashes," delighting themselves in things which cannot profit. The fact is, when Christians are at a place of worldly amusement (if Christians are to be found, who will venture themselves so unguardedly into Satan's strong places,) they must either have heavenly thoughts, (and then the amusement would appear so rapid, disgusting, and uninteresting, that they would never be able to stay it out;) or else, if the amusement is an amusement to them, it fills their hearts with a crowd of vain thoughts, shuts out Christ, and lets in self and the world, and so prepares room for doubts, and fears, and much bitter repentance, before the Spirit will again shine upon a heart, which has so wantonly despised His grace. But many will say—'All this may take place if we stay at home; our worldly hearts may let in many intruders there; and we may be compelled to own, that we should have been as well at any place of public resort, as in our own room, with no one to talk to but our own heart.' This, I confess, is our shame and misery—that we are so often entangled in vain and worldly thoughts. But surely it does but make the argument stronger against indulging in anything which tends to foment such thoughts. If we are so weak, why go into temptation, against which the strongest have not been able to stand? We may fall into a worldly frame of mind in the absence of any worldly pleasures; but, because we have got a cruel enemy within, shall we go and expose ourselves to the attacks of the enemy from without? Let us at least have the comfort of not having gone in quest of our misery. Temptations enough will come to us; let us not go to them. Besides, it seems to me but mocking "our Father which is

¹ James iv. 4.² Deut. vi. 7.³ Genesis xliii. 30.

in heaven"—to say, one hour—"Lead us not into temptation"¹—when we have coolly made up our mind to rush into it the next. From the evil of such a temptation, can we hope that he will deliver us? Let me draw your attention to the important precept of our Lord—"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open to him immediately!"² Now, dear —, I am sure you would not choose, that your Lord should come for you, while engaged in worldly amusements; nor would you feel, that he found you watching; nor would you be ready to "open *immediately*;" but would rather ask time to collect your scattered thoughts, and trim your wasted lamp. If we were to ask the blessed in heaven, or the tormented in hell, what they think of such employments, would not the one smile with pity at the question, and the other exclaim with rage—"Oh that I had but one of those hours you are thus throwing away! You should see whether I would let the precious moments pass in such vanities as these." Forgive me, if I have said too much. Indeed I should tremble for you, going into such a difficult situation, if I did not know, that God can take as much care of you there, as in a more retired place.

'I do earnestly desire, that the blessing of a single eye and undivided heart may be yours. There is no comfort in being an undecided Christian; and Christ himself has declared that such a character is hateful to him.³ But this will not be the case with you: He who has helped you thus far, will go on leading you by the hand, till He has brought you to glory. You ask me, 'How are we to wean our hearts from the world?' I know no other answer but that which the Scripture gives.⁴ A believing view of Jesus must make the world look dark and insignificant: and whenever we begin to love it too much, we have only to apply to Him, who has said to us, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world;"⁵ and His mighty power shall be put forth to enable us to overcome it also. I used to make many resolutions against a worldly spirit, and try many ways to break myself to it; and these resolutions were repeatedly broken; but now I have but one way; I try to take my heart to Jesus, believing that the victory is already mine for His sake. 'Lord, thou hast promised, that "sin shall not have dominion over me."⁶ Thou hast said, that every one that is "born of thee overcometh the world." Fulfil thy gracious promise, and make me "more than conqueror" in thy might! Thou hast "given thyself for my sins, that thou mightest deliver me from this present world;"⁷ and wilt thou now leave me to be taken captive by this evil world? O dear —, the faithful God must become like unto lying, promise-breaking man, before He can refuse to help his servants, who thus cast themselves on His word of promise; and disclaim all wisdom, strength, and goodness but His. The world and

¹ Matthew vi. 13.² Luke xii. 35—37.³ Rev. iii. 15, 16.⁴ 1 John iv. 4; v. 4, 5.⁵ John xvi. 33.⁶ Romans vi. 14.⁷ Galatians i. 4.

the things of the world, as "a strong man armed, who keepeth his goods in peace," must continue to have possession of our hearts, till Christ, who is "stronger than" the world, breaks in, and claims the house of the strong man, as a mansion for His Spirit to dwell in.¹ Cast yourself, then, without fear upon the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus. The more worldly and wicked you feel yourself to be, the more He is concerned to show His power and faithfulness in saving you from your worldliness and wickedness.²

The next letter upon the same subject was written shortly afterwards, to another correspondent, whom she regarded with the most lively affection, as having been made instrumental in communicating to her soul the knowledge and love of her Saviour.

‘ March 22, 1827.

‘ You must, I think, have misunderstood my meaning about worldly company and amusements. Let us but have a right motive for doing so ; and I think we may safely go into any company whatever. The word of God affords us two valuable rules for all our actions, and if we could set them always before our eyes, I believe we should seldom be at a loss as to the conduct we ought to pursue : “ Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, *do all to the glory of God.* And—whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, *do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,* giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.”² Let us then always ask ourselves, before we set about any study, or employment, or enter into any company—‘ Am I doing this “to the glory of God?” Is it my sole, or at least my principal motive? Can I “do it in the name of the Lord Jesus?” Can I boldly say—it is such an action as he would approve of? And can I look up to Him all the time I am doing it, for his sanction and blessing?’ If you can answer this question satisfactorily, the action, whatever it be, *must* be right ; and there can be no danger attending the performance of it. If, on the contrary, your mind recoils from even asking such a question, be assured that there is something wrong in it, and that you would do well to give it up. It is a hard lesson to our carnal hearts, but one which the love of Jesus can make easy to us ; that from the moment we take refuge at the cross of Jesus, and are “washed from our sins in his blood”—from that happy moment we are “no longer our own,” and must make it our one business to “glorify God in our body and spirit, which are God’s.”³ This seems to me the great and marked distinction between the Christian and the worlding. The one lives to himself ; the other “to Him who died for him and rose again.”⁴ The one consults his own pleasure, ease, and safety, “leans to his own understanding,” and seeks his own glory. The other prays, that his will may be quite swallowed up in the will of Jesus ; “ceases from his own wisdom,” and makes “Christ his wisdom.” He no longer “receives the

¹ Luke xi. 21, 22.

³ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

² 1 Cor. x. 31. Colossians iii. 17.

⁴ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

honor which cometh of men ;” but desires that Christ, the Author of all his good things, may have all the glory of them. His fleshly nature, or—as St. Paul calls it, the old man, strives hard against this, and would lead him to please and honor himself again ; and this is the great conflict between the flesh and the spirit, which makes the Christian life so truly called a warfare. This conflict has already begun in you, my dearest friend, and will never cease till death takes you from sense and self, to where you shall see Jesus as he is, and wonder that you could ever prefer anything to Him. No wonder you find it a hard and strange conflict. Parting with self-seeking, self-honoring, and self-righteousness, is far more painful than cutting off a right hand, or plucking out a right eye. “With man, indeed, this is impossible ; but with” Jesus “all things are possible.” Taking this consideration with us, then, that Christ—not self—is to be the end of all our actions, and that “whether we eat or drink,” or speak, go in or out, or are alone or in company, engaged in study or recreation, we must “do all to the glory of God,” and “in the name of the Lord Jesus”—I think it will give us a very different view of our duty as to worldly company and employments, from any that worldly wisdom or policy can give us.

It cannot be, however, for the glory of God, that we should show ourselves morose and unsociable. The friends and relations we have are His gifts, and therefore must not be despised or neglected. Besides, we ought to bear in mind, that the redeemed of Christ are “the salt of the earth.” “a peculiar people,” created anew in Christ Jesus for the very purpose of “showing forth his praises :”¹ and how can we do this, if we shut ourselves out altogether from the world ? It is false humility, which makes us say, ‘I can never do any good’—for the meaner the instrument, the more is the glory of God displayed in doing good with it ; and as it is all God’s doing and not ours, we have no reason to be proud of it, but rather to be abased at the sight of our own unfitness. I own to you, that I consider it the greatest blessing to a worldly family to have even one Christian among them (though I know they think it a sad interruption) : for who can tell, but God may hear the prayers and tears of that one, and make him or her the messenger of peace to the rest ? Thus far, then, I think it must be right to go into worldly company, in the discharge of relative duties *not plainly inconsistent with the word of God* ; or to avail ourselves of any providential opportunities of Christian usefulness. Let us, however, be careful, that our own spiritual state is not affected by it ; for we can never be required to enter into any things to the hurt of our own souls. But on the other hand, my dear friend, I think, if we really love Christ, this occasional mixing with worldly company will be rather a sacrifice than a pleasure to us. For think what it is to go amongst worldly people “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” and “to the glory of our God.” Even if we do not feel ourselves called on to speak to them directly on the subject ; still if we keep this aim in view,

¹ Matt. v. 13. Eph. ii. 10. 1 Peter ii. 9.

in how many little things must we show that our sentiments are opposite to theirs! And if they know that we profess religion, we may be almost sure that they view us with secret dislike and contempt; for "the carnal heart is" and always will be "enmity against God" and his people. I have seldom been into worldly company, without feeling either very uncomfortable all the time I was in it, or very unhappy as soon as I came out of it; for if God enabled me to keep his glory in view, the sight of so many souls perishing in a vain confidence of their own safety; the sense of my inability to speak properly to them; the consciousness that in many cases at least they would gladly have dispensed with my company, all these things could not but make me uncomfortable—*not unhappy*; because, *supposing that I was in the clear path of duty*—in the midst of vain company and sad reflections, I could still hold communion with Jesus. But when I lost sight of this great end, O dear —, I wish I could point to you the anguish I have endured, that you might avoid dishonoring your Saviour as I have done! Very, very often this has been my wretched case:—"What will people think of me, if I set up to be so much better than others?" This ensnaring question has often made me put on a levity of sentiment and manner, which I did not at first feel, but which, persisted in, has become real; and I have been in heart as well as in appearance, the worldliest of the worldly. And even when I have returned home, God has often seen fit to visit this sin, by leaving me still to backslide in heart, and to be "filled with my own ways;"¹ and when I have come to myself, (for he has never *quite* left me, nor ever will) how can I describe the bitterness of thinking, that I had done dishonor to the cause of my Only Friend, lost the heavenly sense of His redeeming love, missed many opportunities of saying a word which he might have blessed, and by my light and foolish conduct given occasion to the world to think, that religion was a thing in word only, not in power!

'I have told you my experience; but I believe it is more or less what every Christian feels; only few have been so very guilty in this respect as I have. Even now, though I know, that all these sins are washed away in my Redeemer's blood, I cannot reflect without the deepest self-abhorrence on the vain and foolish conduct I often indulged in at —, particularly the sin of evil speaking, which I gave way to there more than anywhere. I might add, that of sabbath-breaking. Do not think that I mean to lay it to their charge; oh! no; I only mean, that by going into the society of worldly people, if I may so say, without my armor on, I became as vain as they, and much more sinful; because I sinned against light and grace. Surely, then, if we consider these drawbacks, worldly people will not be our chosen companions; and we shall go among them, when we do, as a duty rather than a pleasure.

'With regard to the theatre, and amusements of this kind, Chris-

¹ Prov. xiv. 14.

tians must have little to do, if they can find time for them. But if they could find time, I confess I am at a loss to see what pleasure they can find there. Are not the sentiments usually uttered in such places quite in opposition to the precepts of God's word? Are not pride, vain-glory, self-destruction, hatred, dissipation, unlawful attachments, held up to our admiration in many theatrical compositions, considered as trivial faults in most of them, and detested upon right principles in none? You profess, as a Christian, to make Jesus your happiness. What can you find here to bring you into communion with him? You profess to make his glory your aim? Can you then sit with complacency, and hear a company of your fellow-creatures with immortal souls, uttering sentiments which only tend to make them despise Christ and his ways? But I will leave the subject, dear —, only adding, that I do not wish you to give up this amusement from what I say, but from the settled conviction of your own mind, after prayer for Divine teaching. If then you find, that you can neither "do it to the glory of God, or in the name of Jesus," I will not try to dissuade you from it. I was once induced to attend 'Matthews at Home,' and shall never forget the sensation I felt, when he told us how his father, who was a good kind of man, but *too religious*, had tried to keep him from coming on the stage. When I looked round, and saw the merriment expressed in every face, I could not help saying to myself—'This is no place for me; there are no lovers of Christ here; for "charity rejoiceth not in iniquity,"¹ as these poor deluded people are doing.'

'And now, my dearest friend, I have proposed many privations to you; and what have I to offer you in return? Nothing but the love of Jesus; nay, this is yours already; for if you are enabled to give these things up, it will be—not that he may love you, but because he has loved you. The blessed spirits above want nothing else to make them happy, and we soon hope to taste their happiness; but if it cannot make us happy here, then heaven itself would not make us happy. Oh let us pray for this love! Let us cast off the spirit of bondage, and not come to God, as slaves, *who must serve him*; but as his redeemed children, *who love to serve him*, and who find his "service perfect freedom." Let us pray that more of "the love of God may be shed abroad in our hearts." Let us beseech the Holy Ghost to "take of the things of Jesus, and show them to us." Let us study all the sweet relations in which he has revealed himself to us in the Scriptures—Father, brother, friend, husband, lover. Here is a perpetual and rational study for us; and the more we follow it, the sweeter we shall find it. It is but a little ray of this love that as yet has warmed my heart; yet I can tell you, dearest and most beloved friend, that it is worth renouncing ten thousand worlds for. The Lord Jesus has sometimes drawn near to me with such unspeakable sweetness, that I have thought all the lovely relations of life,—father, husband, friend,—

¹ 1 Corinthians xiii. 6.

had no beauty in them, except as they served to shadow forth the immense love of our reconciled God in Him, and the near and intimate communion, to which he admits his chosen and redeemed people. O my friend, he has chosen you! What a wonder of love is here! He has redeemed you, at the price of his own precious blood, "from this evil world."¹ Will you linger in it any longer? God forbid! May the Spirit of God "fill you with such peace and joy in believing," as may make the world and the things of it appear to you in their true light! Remember, this is not your home. "We are strangers and pilgrims" here. Let not the world see, that the joys of the love of Christ, and communion with him, are not enough to occupy us, without having recourse to the many vain and trifling ways they have invented of killing time, and driving eternity out of their thoughts. If we want strength, there is fullness of strength and grace treasured up for us in Jesus: and we have only to seek it by earnest prayer. I wish you would pray for more experience of his love to you. This would convince you, more than all the arguments in the world, of the vanity of everything, which can tend to divert your mind from him. In seeking his love you may be able to say with Jacob—"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!"²—I shall look for your next very anxiously. Do not let these words, 'affected,' 'precise,' 'hypocrite,' 'enthusiast,' 'fool,' 'madman,' and many other epithets, which perhaps you will hear lavished upon the followers of the Lamb, discourage you from making his cause and people your own. I cannot but remind you—that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution."³ Not perhaps open persecution now, but ridicule, dislike, sneering, either open or secret, must be your lot, if you determine to "be not conformed to this world." We must not think it hard, or be angry or disheartened, if these things come upon us; for our Master was a scorn and a derision to all around him.

'Do not cease to love me, and think of me always, dearest ——, as yours most affectionately and entirely attached.'

P. S. 'I earnestly join in your wish, that this may be the commencement of a new and blessed period of your life. May every future year see us walking more closely and more humbly with God.'

In a third letter to her cousin, about a month subsequent, she again reverts to her Scriptural Rules.

'April, 20, 1827.

'I feel exceedingly at a loss, my dear friend, how to answer your interesting question—'What is the meaning of giving up the world?' For I do not consider, that giving up the world consists in renouncing its amusements, its company, its pursuits, so much as in putting off its temper and spirit, that we may put on the spirit

¹ Galatians i. 4.

² Genesis xxxii. 26.

³ 2 Timothy iii. 12.

and temper that was in Christ Jesus. When the spirit of the world is thus exchanged for the Spirit of Christ, the amusements and gayeties of the world must (not perhaps all at once, but gradually and surely) come to be extremely vain and unsatisfying in our opinion. For though the word "communion with God" is considered as the mere creation of an enthusiastic imagination, yet if we will allow the Scriptures to be true, we must allow that there is such a thing as "holding fellowship with the Father and the Son," as "walking with God" day by day "in perfect peace," as "having Christ living in us," and "his Holy Spirit abiding in us;"¹ for by this, and by this only can we know that we are in Christ, even by his Spirit which abideth in us. Now let us suppose a person enjoying—not the flights of a false and self-seeking devotion—but real, sober, scriptural converse with God, and that daily; must not this be a happiness superior to any the world can give? See what David thought of it—"As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: Thou, O Lord God, art the thing that I long for. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times. In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee."² &c. &c. And so in a thousand songs of love has David left on record what he thought of "communion with God." What must have been Job's view of the subject, when he said—"My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God. O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments!"³—Isaiah's—when he said, "O Lord, the desire of our soul is unto thy name, and to the remembrance of thee! With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early!"⁴ But I need not multiply proofs of what seems to need no proofs—that communion with his Creator is the best, and noblest, and happiest thing of which a creature is capable. Then will not they who enjoy this communion, very carefully avoid whatever may tend to rob them of it? They will soon find that converse with the world (*unless as far as duty or necessity lead them into it*) is not compatible with converse with God: for if they conform to this world's habits and opinions, they deprive themselves of all scriptural claim to hope that God dwells in them, and they in Him. But if on the contrary, they are "transformed in the spirit of their minds," they will soon find that the world will dislike or ridicule them. But until we are delivered from the spirit of the world, I cannot see how we can reasonably be expected to

¹ 1 John i. 3. Gen. v. 24. Isaiah xxvi. 3. Gal. ii. 20. 1 John ii. 24.

² Psalm xlii. 1, 2; lxxi. 4. P. T; lxxiii. 25; cxix. 20; lxii. 7; lxiii. 5, 6.

³ Job xvi. 20; xxiii. 3, 4.

⁴ Isaiah xxvi. 8, 9.

see any harm whatever in the customs of the world. Let the world that dwells and rules within be deposed, and the world without will soon lose its undue influence over us. But dearest —, let us “stick to”¹ the Scriptures as our rule and standard in everything, (thus our doubts upon every subject will be quickly satisfied); and let us study them with prayer, that he, “who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, would shine into our dark hearts, to give them the knowledge of the glory” of the Gospel of God. We shall not ask in vain; for “God giveth wisdom liberally, and without upbraiding.” May he give you that “wisdom which is from above;” since not all the wisdom of this world can find out God. There are in the sacred word two rules, which, if kept in view, might be a lamp to guide our feet in the darkest and most perplexing moments—“Whether ye eat, or drink, or *whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*” “*Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.*”² Now in going to a ball, or a play, merely to indulge my own vanity, or gratify my own inclination, I could not say—I am “doing this to the glory of God,” I could not set about it “in the name of the Lord Jesus;” therefore as a Christian, I think I have no right to do it at all. But if any one could go “to the glory of God,” I cannot dispute their right of going. In visiting my friends and spending a little intercourse in social converse with them, I have no feeling of this kind to draw me back, for God has given us our friends, and therefore requires us to be active in every social duty; and religion has done little for us, if it has taught us to be morose and unsociable; for the very soul of religion is to live not to ourselves, but to others. Still I think that, as far as we can, we should choose our friends rather among the friends of God, than among the friends and followers of the world. You mention music;—so far from thinking it wrong in all cases, I think in my own, it is absolutely a religious duty to pursue music, as far as my health will permit; and I think the same with regard to you. But supposing we had no particular object in studying it, still I think that music, as affording a pleasing and innocent source of amusement to ourselves and others, cannot be considered wrong, though I should think it wrong to give more than a very moderate time to it, or to let it encroach upon any other duty. For a real Christian—to say the least of it—has so great a work in hand; so many really important and interesting objects daily solicit his attention, excite his energies, and set every faculty of soul and body to work; that he or she can have very little time to throw away upon mere amusements. I have given you my opinion as well as I can, because you asked me, not because I wish or expect you to be guided by it: for I am persuaded, that if you continue searching the Bible with earnest prayer, God himself will lead you into every good and pleasant way. I have known many religious people, who have not seen

¹ See Psalm cxix. 31.

² 1 Cor. x. 31. Col. iii. 17.

the necessity of separating themselves entirely from the world at first; but I never knew any one who did not see it at last. Let me then close this subject, dearest —, by calling to your remembrance that encouraging invitation in Corinthians: “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”¹

These letters will, we think, be admitted to discuss this important subject with much Christian wisdom and spirituality. Here are no harsh or sweeping denunciations, but a plain reference to the rules of Christ; to the general principles, taste, and spirit of the Gospel; and to the test of conscience and experience. Two particulars are worthy of special remarks—*her principle, and her rules.*

Her principle is the superior attractiveness of the Gospel, as the only effectual opposition to a worldly spirit—“A believing view of Christ—as she justly observed—‘must make the world look dark and insignificant.’² The merchantman would never have suffered his “godly pearls” to be snatched from him; but the first sight of “the pearl of great price” was sufficient inducement to him gladly to relinquish them.³ The apostle would never have yielded up his good name in the church with all his other sources of gain to the persuasive power of argument. But “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord” once manifested to his soul, made what before was his all, now “loss”—yea—“dung” in his sight.⁴ Thus in every case, simple faith is the principle of Christian decision.

It is often a ground of self-delusive complaint—“If we were less entangled with the world, we should reach to far higher attainments in the excellency of this heavenly knowledge.” This is doubtless a truth. Yet the converse is perhaps the most accurate and important statement. *It is because we know so little of Christ that we are so much entangled with the world.* Here we have the radical principle of the evil laid open. General and superficial views of our glorious Saviour offer but a feeble resistance to the mighty, subtle, and incessant operation of a worldly spirit. Deep, self-abasing, and spiritual apprehensions of the Gospel must be perseveringly sought for, and maintained in constant exercise under Divine teaching and grace. To the heart thus attracted to Christ by the active contemplation of faith—the world in its most alluring forms will ever be a crucified object, an object of shame and revulsion.⁵ And if this heavenly contemplation be followed out in all his relations to us of infinite tenderness and love, how will it cover us with shame, that a moment should ever have been found for any other object of *paramount* desire, affection, and interest! We must, however, carry this powerful principle of faith into all the particulars of practical application. We must not forget the supreme authority of the scriptural commands for nonconformity to the world;⁶ nor

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

² Page 427.

³ Matt. xiii. 45, 46.

⁴ Phil. iii. 7, 8.

⁵ Compare 1 John v. 4, 5. Gal. vi. 14.

⁶ Such as Rom. xii. 2. 2 Cor. vi. 17. 1 John ii. 15.

must we refrain from rebuking whatever appears to us in detail to be inconsistent with these commands. But except our remonstrances are grounded upon the full and clear principles of the Gospel, we shall—instead of “laying the axe to the root of the tree”—only prune the branches for more luxuriant fruitfulness. The worldly taste may be restrained—but not subjugated; and the heart, if it be even partially drawn from the world, will be turned to self-righteousness, not to Christ.

As to *Miss Graham's rules*, it is a vain attempt to fix precise limits to every particular act. Yet the scriptural rules which she has adduced, may be brought to bear upon every difficulty; and if the application of them will not make us infallibly right, it will at least preserve us from being materially wrong. The force of relative obligation as an ordinance of God, is in clear conformity with these rules, and as such is strongly inculcated by Miss Graham; while at the same time it is always connected with faithfulness and decision of conduct, and never made an excuse for overstepping the line of demarcation. The point of worldly conformity commences, and the habit of it is strengthened, in the neglect of Christian simplicity of profession. Either these rules are not spiritually apprehended, or they are not conscientiously regarded, or there is a want of intelligent capacity to apply them. Many young inquirers, of unformed habits and unexercised profession, have lost their slight impressions of religion in an unguarded association with the world. And how many more established professors have, by unspiritual habits, become unconsciously conformed to the taste, maxims, or society of the world, even while they have “escaped its” external “pollutions.” We would earnestly recommend the application of these rules to every step and point of contact with the world. Let them be the test for the daily “trial of our spirit.” Let us cultivate that tender susceptibility of conscience, which impressed this devoted child of God with poignant sorrow and humiliation, in a single instance of overstepping the boundary, or neglecting the rule of her known duty.² We are persuaded that this habit of mind diligently cherished would issue in the conviction, that the points of necessary or hopeful intercourse with the world, are not so frequent as were imagined; that the rational pleasure of its society ill compensates for the painful loss that is felt in the secret retirement; that positive evil belongs to unnecessary communication with it: and that increasing circumspection is needed even in the path of duty. The responsibility of maintaining our profession will be more deeply felt; and a path of retreat sought for, where that profession seems to be impracticable. We shall walk not by expediency, but by scriptural rule. Self-indulgence will yield to the dictates of conscience, and double-mindedness to the simplicity of the Gospel. “The eye being thus single, the whole body will be full of light.”³ Religion will assume a different caste. It will be marked by a holy and heavenly

¹ See p. 129.

² See pp. 130.

³ Matt. vi. 22.

stamp. It will be—not a system of restraints—but a religion of privilege—the strictness of its rules wholly divested of moroseness, and forming an effectual safeguard of its consistency and fruitfulness. Thus God will be seen in his true character, as “having pleasure in the prosperity of his servant,” who needs not to be beholden to the world for that happiness, which it promises to its votaries in substance, but gives only in shadow and delusion.

The length and seriousness of this important discussion may be happily relieved by a sprightly effort of Miss Graham’s imagination bearing immediately upon our subject. It was written impromptu in her friend’s manuscript book. The picture was probably suggested by her residence on the sea-side.

‘February, 1830.

“*Thy people shall be my people.*” Ruth i. 16. I have sometimes thought, that the Christian, who willingly casts his lot among those to whom the doctrine of the cross is foolishness, and sits down in the world as if he were of the world, is like the foolish little bird, that should build its nest in the mast of some tall ship. At first it seems a place of security and peace; but soon the vessel looses from its anchor, and the little songster is borne away it knows not whither. The trees and flowery hedges, and bright sunny meadows, are fast going out of sight. Fain would the poor bird spread its wings and regain them; but how can it leave its nestlings, its treasures, which it has confided to that strange and troubled dwelling! No, no; its all is launched into the deep; and with anxious, constant care it must hover round the dear nest, and seek for strange and scanty food for its young. And at first the vessel may glide smoothly on, while the wind gently plays with its sails, and the sun lights them up to a snowy whiteness, and the gilded waves break in sparkles round the stately prow. Then the little visitant pours forth its sweet song, and gladdens the sailor’s heart by the fond tale it tells him of happiness and home. Yet all the while it is only lamenting its desolation, and pining after the pleasant haunts in the green wood, and the dear companions, by whom its notes were answered from bush to bush, till the very boughs waved in joy to their merry strains. But oh! poor bird, if a storm arise, how will thou flutter round thy nestlings, and tremble, lest they should be swept away by the pitiless waves, or chilled into death by the piercing winds! Yes, little trembler, thou hast placed thyself and thine offspring in a perilous situation; nor is it thou that canst save them, but thy Father and ours, without whom not so much as a sparrow falleth to the ground. He it was that took care of thee, when thou wast safely lodged in thine own leafy branches; and he can take care of thee now; can teach the rude sailor to respect thy helplessness, and hush the stormy winds, that they ruffle not a feather of thy wing. And thus, Christian, if thou hast wilfully

¹ Psalm xxxv. 27.

withdrawn thyself from the shadow of that tree, which spreads forth its branches for all the fowls of heaven to dwell in ; if thou hast made thee a home away from the Lord's people ; many a bitter hour of loneliness and desolation shalt thou have, while thou art "singing the Lord's song in a strange land." Thou shalt rue thy folly, and be humbled for it. Yet be not utterly cast down, but still trust in thy God, who will not fail to rebuke and chasten, but will never leave thee nor forsake thee.¹

IV.—HER SENTIMENTS UPON MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS.

WE now conclude this long series of quotation, with some extracts of a more miscellaneous character.

It is delightful to observe all her views of science—extensive and accurate as they were—to have been admitted and enjoyed through a heavenly medium. Whichever way she looked in this wide expanse, her eye was transfixed in the contemplation of the unsearchable mysteries of redeeming love. We may instance the following sketch of Christian Astronomy—extracted from her manuscript. Speaking of the withering influence of Mathematics upon the pleasures of the imagination—and having (as we have already seen¹) suggested the study of classical literature, as furnishing some antidote for this evil—she further adds on this point :

'It is scarcely possible to pursue mathematics to any extent, without being led by them into some of those sciences, of which they form the vestibule. *Astronomy*—for instance—presents a field for the largest and noblest exercises of the imagination. The stars—'the poetry of heaven'—afford not only perpetual employment for the reason, but unbounded scope to the fancy. The objects of astronomical study display a sublimity which exalts the imagination ; a mystery which humbles the intellect ; a wisdom which enlarges every faculty of the soul, and a loveliness which soothes every feeling of the heart. They have, like their Divine Author—"heights, depths, and breadths"—unfathomable—inscrutable. Here we may soar, as upon the wings of angelic intelligence. Here we may expatiate, till our minds are lost in infinity. But with what unutterable astonishment does the Christian astronomer gaze upon the innumerable host ! He is conscious that God is all around him. His mind is possessed by one idea—the presence, the immense, the all-pervading presence of the God who made and upholds all these. For an instant he forgets his own littleness, and becomes vast as the objects of his contemplation ; for there are moments when the human soul seems to expand into something of its original grandeur. But the humbling consciousness returns, as soon as his full heart will give him leave to think, and he shrinks into insignificance. It is nothing to be the least, the meanest of the creatures of God. But to be a fallen creature—this bows him to the dust. Sin has made

¹ Page 39.

him an outcast from the beautiful creation, an alien from the creating God. A holy God is on every side : and he is not holy.

‘But yet his thrilling awe is cheered with joy, hope and love. “The day-star arises in his heart;”¹ and now every other star has a voice, “a still small voice;” and tells a tale of love, which the angels delight to hear—a mystery, “which the angels desire to look into.”²

‘He who made us is “the God of thy salvation.” He is “thy beloved and thy Friend.” Thus hath the God who made the heavens, who ordained the moon and the stars, been mindful of man, visited him in his low estate, and “crowned him with glory and honor.”³ “Praise ye him, sun and moon; praise him, all ye stars of light; praise him, ye heaven of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens.”⁴

‘Christians! you can “sing praises with understanding.”⁵ All ye that love the Lord, praise the name of the Lord. “Praise the Lord, O my soul.”⁶

While this sublime science has been perverted (as in the French school of philosophy) for man’s contemptuous rejection of his Maker, it is most refreshing to observe the magnificent illustrations, by which the “heavens,” viewed through the medium of Christian philosophy, “declare the glory of God.”⁷ In this field of elevated contemplation, the eye of faith “leads us up from nature,” not only to “nature’s God,” but to the Christian’s God—the God of his salvation. Here we discover what the “eye” of reason “has not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man,”⁸ untaught by God. If—as our poet of the Night has decided—‘an undevout astronomer is mad,’ even the *devout man of science* is not in the full possession of his faculties, nor in the enjoyment of the clear perception of the objects of his delighted observation, except he has been instructed in the highest school of Divine science, and enabled to trace in the Maker of the starry frame his God and Saviour—his faithful, unchangeable, Almighty friend.

We pass to another field of science, of more general interest. Miss Graham’s Musical Tract, already referred to,⁹ will, it is believed, be found to give an accurate sketch of the principles of its own department of the science. Its style is buoyant with life, beauty, and power. It occasionally mounts almost to the magnificent prose of John Milton or Jeremy Taylor. Take the following as a specimen.

Speaking to her young pupil of the importance of practising, she sends her to the woods and groves for a stimulating example of industry.

‘I can tell you, that the little musicians of the grove do not attain their wild and delicate modulations without practice. When I lay

¹ 2 Peter i. 19.

² 1 Peter i. 12.

³ Psalm viii. 4, 5.

⁴ Psalm cxlviii. 3, 4.

⁵ Ib. xlvii. 7.

⁶ Ib. ciii. 22.

⁷ Psalm xix. 1.

⁸ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

⁹ See page 41.

in bed last summer, unable to speak or move for many hours in the day, the songs of the birds furnished me with an inexhaustible source of amusing observation. I could not but feel grateful to the melodious little creatures, who beguiled me of half my pain, and made the weary hours of sickness fly away upon wings as light as their own. As if led by an instinctive sympathy, numbers of blackbirds and thrushes came to build their nests round our garden; and the woodpigeons, which had been silent the year before, renewed their soft notes in the high trees by the parsonage-lawn. However, they were shy, and I thought myself fortunate, if once or twice in the day, their gentle cooing found its way to my ear. But there was one thrush, whose notes I soon learned to distinguish from all the other thrushes; indeed his skill seemed to exceed theirs, as much as Cordoba's¹ exceeds yours or mine. Every morning I listened for his voice, which was sure to precede the matins of all the other birds. In the day-time, his brilliant tones were mingled and almost lost in the general melody; but as soon as the sun was preparing to set, when the blackbirds had either sung themselves to sleep, or were flown off to keep up their festivities elsewhere, then was my thrush's practising time. He was kind enough to select a tree not far from my window, while the other thrushes placed themselves at a respectful distance, and edged in a note here and there as they could. He opened the rehearsal with a number of wild trills and calls, which I could not well understand; only they were very sweet and cheering to me; and he would pause between each, till a soft response was heard from some distant bough. But when he had fixed upon a little cadence which pleased him, it became a more serious business. Strange to say, I could always tell when this would be; for what pleased me particularly was sure to please him; so true it is that nature has given the same perception of melody to man and to birds. He would chant it over in a low tone two or three times, as if to make himself sure of it; then he carolled it out with triumphant glee; then stopped short on a sudden, as much as to say to his rivals—'Which of you can imitate my strains?' Their notes sounded most sweet at various distances during these little intervals; but they seemed conscious of their inferiority to my favorite, who would suddenly break out into the very same melody, upon which he had doubtless been musing all the while, enriching it by some little note or trill, the wildest and most touching that ever came into a thrush's heart. I needed neither concert nor music-master, while I could listen to the untaught, but not unpremeditated, harmony of this original professor: nor could I quarrel with the sickness, which had been the means of developing another link in that mysterious chain, which binds me to the rest of creation, by opening my ear and my heart more than ever to the language of universal nature. But I often wished to have you with me, that you might hear how much pains

¹ An eminent musical professor among the Spanish Refugees, to whom she was indebted for much valuable instruction.

the birds are at to charm us with their warbling. It is pretty also to hear the young birds commence their small and faltering strains, which grow clearer and louder, till they are no longer distinguished from the rest. True, it is their profession, and we have many things to think of; but what time we do give to the study of music, we should give it with all our hearts, as they do.¹

For effective playing she gives the following sensible rules, interspersing them with her own happy illustrations.

‘I have told you that to play a piece effectively, you must comprehend it well. You must also *feel* it deeply. It is impossible to excite lively emotions in another’s breast, while your own remains untouched. There are two rules, which may assist you to attain quick perceptions of what is correct and beautiful; and (with the help of the mechanical rules I have given you) to bring those perceptions out in your own performance. *The first is, to cultivate a constant habit of listening to natural sounds.* Everything in nature has a melody which goes to the heart, and from which we may gain some new and delightful ideas. I have called your attention to the song of birds. Then there is the bleating of flocks, and the lowing of distant herds, and the busy hum of insects. Above all, the modulations of the human voice afford us a perpetual source of observation. From thence we may gather the expression of every stormy passion which agitates, and every tender affection which soothes the heart. Nor can we listen to the fairy tones of children, their light-hearted carols, their bursts of tiny merriment, their mimic griefs, and simply-told stories, without imbibing some new and charming combinations of harmonious expression. If music brings no lovely thoughts and associations to your mind, you are learning it to very little purpose. If it does, an intimate acquaintance with the music of nature will invest the expression of those thoughts with a grace and refinement, which the most persevering practice will fail to impart. Take lessons of the winds and of the waters, and of the trees; of all animate and all inanimate nature. So shall the very spirit of sweet sound and expression enter into your bosom, and lie there, ready to pour itself forth upon the otherwise low and mechanical music, which the pressure of your hands produces on the instrument. One of Handel’s finest pieces is said to have been suggested by the labor of a blacksmith at his anvil; so successfully did he watch for the harmony that lies wrapped in the commonest sounds.

‘*The next rule I shall give you is, to listen attentively to skilful performers; noticing particularly what emotions are excited in your mind by every passage; and by what means they contrive to produce the effect which pleases you.* The gratification we derive from listening to music, is similar to that which poetry imparts to us. Both these delightful arts call into being a thousand beautiful imaginations, tender feelings, and passionate impulses. But in

¹ Pp. 21—23.

reading poetry, we are delighted with the thoughts of another person; and though a beautiful idea will give us new pleasure every time we recur to it, still this pleasure is little varied, and depends on the conformation of the poet's mind, rather than of our own. The delights of music are of our own creation. We become for the time poets ourselves, and enjoy the high privilege of inventing, combining, and diversifying, at pleasure, the images which harmonious sounds raise on our minds. The self-same melody may be repeated a hundred times, and inspire each time a train of thought different from the last. Sometimes it will call forth all the hidden stores of memory—absent friends, voices long silent in the tomb, lovely scenes, pleasant walks, and happy hours, come back to us in all their freshness and reality. Then the future opens its dreary prospects, gilded by hope, and chastened by a mournful tenderness. The exile is restored in glad anticipation to his country; the prodigal sobs out his penitence on his father's bosom; the child of affliction is safely lodged in that mansion where sorrow and crying are unknown. Sometimes the past is forgotten, the future unheeded, the mind wrapped up in the present consciousness of sublimity or beauty. Forms of delicate loveliness, things such as dreams are made of, float before the mental vision, shaped into something of a waking distinctness. Thoughts too noble to last, high and holy resolves, gushings of tenderness, alternately possess our minds with emotions all equally different, and equally delightful. The poetical inspiration of Alfieri seldom came upon him, but when he was under the influence of music. Haydn's symphonies were all composed so as to shadow forth some simple and affecting story, by which the author excited and varied his own feelings, and wrought them up to that pitch of solemn pathos, or animated gayety, which to this day, inspires all who hear his music with corresponding emotions.¹

The Christian tone and descriptive beauty of the concluding paragraphs will be generally admired. They are in the style of her favorite writer, Jeremy Taylor.

The expression of sacred music comprehends every emotion that can agitate the human heart, and must be felt rather than described. The subdued tones of awful adoration; the impassioned fervor of desire; the humility of prayer; the wailing of penitential sorrow; the glad notes of thanksgiving; and the loud chorus of praise; all these have their own peculiar utterance, and must be pervaded by a depth and solemnity which shall distinguish them from the meaner affections of humanity.

I am fearful of touching too lightly upon this hallowed subject. Many young persons, when their feelings are excited by sacred music, imagine themselves to be bettered by such feelings, and to be under the influence of genuine religious sentiments. But if the plain majesty of the word of God does not suffice to kindle an equal fervor within us, when we are reading it silently and alone, we

¹ Pp. 25—26.

may be sure that the emotions excited by the lovely songs and pleasant instruments of men are the mere ebullitions of natural feeling, and have nothing to do with religion. Those who would sing the praises of the Lord, must "sing them with understanding."¹ The undying torch of truth must be lighted up in that faculty, before it can set the heart in a flame. There exists not a more dangerous delusion, than to mistake the feverish excitement of the imagination for the cheerful and steady glow of a rational devotion.

' But while I so anxiously guard you against this pernicious error, do not for a moment suppose, that I would shut you out from the privilege which all creation enjoys, of sounding its Maker's praise. Oh! there is a harmony in nature, inconceivably attuned to one glad purpose! Everything in the universe has a voice, with which it joins in the tribute of thanksgiving. The whispers of the wind playing with the summer foliage, and its fitful moanings through the autumnal branches; the broken murmur of the stream, the louder gushing of the waterfall, and the wild roar of the cataract, all speak the praises of God to our hearts. Who can sit by the sea-side, when every wave lies hushed in adoration, or falls upon the shore in subdued and awful cadence, without drinking in utterable thoughts of the majesty of God! The loud hosannas of Ocean in the storm, and the praises of God on the whirlwind, awaken us to the same lesson; and every peal of the thunder is a hallelujah to the Lord of Hosts. Oh! there is a harmony in nature! The voice of every creature tells us of the goodness of God. It comes to us in the song of the birds; the deep, delicious tones in which the wood-dove breathes out its happiness; the graceful melting descant of the nightingale; the joyous thrilling melody of the lark; the thrush's wild warbling, and the blackbird's tender whistle; the soft piping of the bullfinch; the gay carol of the wren; the sprightly call of the goldfinch; and the gentle twittering of the swallow. Even now when every other bird is silent, little robin is pouring out his sweetest of all sweet notes upon yonder rose-bush; and so distinctly does he thank God, who made the berries to grow for him upon the hawthorn and mountain-ash, and who has put it into the heart of man to love him, and strew crumbs for him when the berries fail, that my soul, too often insensible to its own mercies, is warned into gratitude for his. The very insect tribe have entered into a covenant that God shall at no season of the year be without a witness amongst them to his praise. For when the hum of the bees and the chirping of the grasshopper have ceased to enliven us, and the gnat has laid by his horn, then the little cricket wakens into life and song, and gladdens our heart with the same story till the winter is past. And so all nature praises God, and is never weary. If then you are able "to make melody in your *heart* to the Lord," let your hand and your voice make melody too, and

¹ Psalm xlvii. 7. 1 Corinthians xiv. 14.

let the faculty which infinite benevolence has created for your enjoyment, be converted, as all your other faculties should be, into the instrument of praise. To know that you make this worthiest use of your musical acquirements will indeed rejoice the heart of

‘Your affectionate Friend and Cousin,
‘MARY.’

The following exercise throws out some additional thoughts upon the connection of poetry and music alluded to in her tract. It was written in the form of a letter to her cousin, for the Italian master then in attendance upon them. As she wrote Italian with considerable spirit, and took some pains with the composition, it may have slightly suffered in a translation.

‘1824.

‘MY DEAR FRIEND,

‘Yesterday I was told of an observation you had made in the conversazione of Mr. B. (where unfortunately I could not meet you,) and as I do not agree with you upon the interesting subject then discussed, I will make it the subject of this letter, begging you to excuse all the dullness, which you will certainly find in my composition. Is it possible, that you have conceived so low an opinion of the pleasures derived from harmony, that they do not appear to you worthy of being compared with those of poetry? I cannot let you rest in this opinion. Allow me to impart to my friend some of the delight which I find in this enchanting art. Not that I wish to say a word against poetry—that purest and most sublime delight of the human mind. Too dear to me are its sweet illusions, in which the usual sense of the ills of the present life is lost, whilst the soul lives in a world properly her own, and sports with beings created and adorned by herself. My intention is only to show you that the pleasures derived from music are not *inferior* to those of poetry, that both proceed from the same source, and mutually assist and heighten each other. You will perhaps remind me of the great antiquity of poetry, and that from the most remote ages it has been the solace of the wounded heart. But this I cannot yield to you. Indeed it appears to me, that music had an earlier birth, and was the mother of poetry. A shepherd one day discovered the flute which nature has formed in the waving reed. Applying it to his lips, he is struck with the beautiful sounds which issue from it, and he endeavors to imitate them with his voice, in simple songs celebrating the beauties of his shepherdess. By degrees the cadences of the harmony suggest to him the idea of rhyme and metre, and thus these two beautiful arts are formed together, with so perfect a sympathy between them, that the one cannot be outraged without some injury to the other. Let us however leave this discussion upon the origin of these arts, (for it would be tiresome for us to search into the records of past ages,) and turn our attention to what is more interest-

ing, the effects which, in *every* age, they have produced on the heart. I wish to search a little into your motives for giving to poetry so vast a superiority; and the secret spring appears to me to be this: the charms of harmony cause a pleasure perceptible to the senses, and for its enjoyment require a certain physical conformation, a fine and exact ear, and other things, which seem to have a connection with the material part of man. You have therefore persuaded yourself, that it is a thing delightful indeed to the senses, but which has little influence upon the mind and upon the heart. I flatter myself that I shall be able to convince you of the injustice of this idea. Not only does music give us many ideas, but they are of the same description with those inspired by poetry, and sometimes even more delightful to the soul. I allow that the sweet harmony enters by the ear. But thence it diffuses itself through every part of the mind. It moves every passion, softens every affection, and creates a thousand delightful imaginations, a thousand divine projects, which excite to all that is noble in resolve, and worthy in art. If I might draw a distinction between music and poetry, I should say that the former brings us pleasure of a higher degree; the latter of a longer duration. Equally do they inspire soft affections and noble ideas.' Then, after following the same train of thought and imagination as in her Musical Tract,¹ she adds in her fervent glow—'And shall not a science, capable of producing these sentiments, be reckoned among the noblest delights of the human mind? I have not time to continue this interesting subject. But I cannot conclude without observing, that the poets themselves owe their finest ideas to music. Do you recollect the power which it had over the mind of our favorite Alfieri? He could scarcely compose without its help. Many of his noble tragedies were conceived at the opera. But do thou, divine Petrarch, come to help, and show her who admires thee so much, that without the music of nature, the song of birds, the murmur of the streams, thou wouldest not have been able to enchant her with thy delicious rhymes. With these beautiful verses I conclude my letter, already too long, entreating you to yield to his representation of the effect of fine sounds upon the mind.

'Se lamentar angeli, o verdi fronde,' &c.

'You know the rest. I have only time to say, that I am always
'Your very affectionate
'MARY.'

Without pronouncing upon the contending claims, (which probably may still be a matter of dispute,) the exercise is not unworthy of the intellectual character of the writer, and is specially interesting, as a burst of that 'vehemence approaching to ecstasy,' which—as Mr. Cecil keenly observed—'the world will allow on almost

¹ See the extract, pp. 124, 125.

every subject, but that which, above all others, will justify it.' If, however, Miss Graham seems here to contend for the precedence of music, she was no less warm a votary of poetry. Though she was no poet herself, and never till the close of her last illness did she exercise even a rhyming propensity, yet her perception of the true genius of the science was lively and accurate, and her enjoyment of its delights proportionate. We have already seen her high zest for Milton. Wordsworth was among her chief modern favorites; and even Lord Byron detained her for a while the victim of his fascinating enchantment. We subjoin a letter of a very early date, descriptive of her feelings, with much discrimination of taste, and with all the glow of her characteristic enthusiasm.

' July 15, 1822.

'I have not seen the Fourth Canto of Childe Harold. I am ashamed to say that I like Manfred. Diabolical as the sentiments of it are in many parts, yet there are some passages of such exquisite beauty and sublimity, that it seems as if a human pen could scarcely have traced them. *All the time I was reading it, I felt I was doing something wrong; yet I read some of it over and over again,* particularly the part where Manfred is upon the point of dashing himself over the precipice. The description of darkness did not please me. I thought it rather horrible than sublime. But I am just now in love with another poet, who is as fond of clothing his pictures with the sunny radiance of happiness and benevolence, as Lord Byron is of spreading over his, darkness and desolation. If you have read any of his trifling poems, you will smile when I mention Wordsworth. But some of his poems are so beautiful! We have just now been reading 'the Excursion.' It is tiresome in many parts; but every now and then you meet with something so strikingly fine, or so unutterably tender, that it is impossible to go on. You must lay down the book, till the ferment it occasions has subsided.'

Should Miss Graham's delight in Lord Byron's writings be a matter of surprise, it may be observed, that her letter distinctly records the rebuke of conscience in her moments of self-indulgence; and we doubt not but her inattention to this rebuke subjected her to the secret frown of her jealous God. We may also add, that shortly after the date of this letter, she readily made the sacrifice of her taste (which to her fervid mind required no ordinary effort) in the total relinquishment of this source of deleterious pleasure. Whatever weight may attach to her judgment will therefore decidedly be found on the side of self-denial, not of self-gratification. Indeed, familiarity with works of poison, whatever be their literary charms, seems inconsistent, not only with Christian simplicity, but with a common regard to our personal welfare. To a pure mind we might have supposed that a rich and splendid fancy would be spoiled of all its attraction by its frequent connection with licentious

profaneness and impiety—moral deformity, sufficient to cast the most exquisite beauties of poetry and genius into the shade; and the very contemplation of which, *except through a scriptural medium*, must be injurious to the best sensibilities of our nature. Even the instruction resulting from the unveiled features of human depravity is obtained—if at all—at considerable hazard. For let it be remembered—as Miss Graham has shown¹—that the direct influence of poetry acts upon the passions, and thus tends to produce a corresponding habit of the mind. The evil propensities therefore portrayed by this master-mind with such awful exactness, and embracing every form of malignity that can darken the heart of man, naturally excite the working of those passions, which it is the grand design of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to restrain and mortify. Whether, therefore, the infidel poison acts with vindictive activity, or with searching subtilty, its pervading influence is equally to be dreaded. We believe that many Christians, especially in moments of temptation, are reaping the bitter fruit of former indulgence; and we are persuaded that none will ultimately have reason to regret the sacrifice of the high pleasures of taste to the far higher claims of their own spiritual interests.

We add one further quotation from Miss Graham's manuscript upon a subject not wholly unconnected with the preceding—works of imagination in a more legitimate, though still a questionable, form—*Religious Novels*. Observing, that 'the taste of the serious public is lamentably vitiated'—she adds, 'The press teems with religious novels, from the long eventful story to the ephemeral trifles, which eke out the pages of the spruce magazine. The greater part of these are feeble to a degree that would render them harmless, were there not a large proportion of readers, whose sickly appetite hankers after such unwholesome food. A few of them, I own, stand out from the rest, and compel our admiration. Yet, I must be permitted to say, that the very interest excited by these superior productions increases their bad tendency. How strange a medley of sensations agitates the heart, that is fluttering between the emotions excited by the well-pictured charms of religion, and the love-scene that is better pictured still! How shall the young and inexperienced distinguish between earthly and heavenly feelings? How shall they determine, whether their agitation arises out of romance or religion; from a heated imagination, or a heart warmed with Divine love?

'I cannot conceive the use or propriety of introducing this kind of sentimental narrative into works professedly of a religious nature. Truth is not adorned but disguised, by being thus tricked out in false glitter and tinsel ornament. There are but two classes of readers; *the converted and the unconverted*. Those of *the former description* would derive more benefit and pleasure too from praying over one verse of the Bible, than from reading a whole library of the

¹ See pp. 124, 127.

above-mentioned performances. They will neither assist him to understand the word of truth himself, nor to explain it to others. It may be truly affirmed of the decided Christian, that for his own sake, the less he reads besides the Bible, the better.¹ But for the sake of his fellow-men, his reading must be more extensive. He must seek to enlarge and confirm his general knowledge; must be prepared to meet inquiry, to cope with prejudice and error; to recommend the cause of religion; "to become," with the Apostle, "all things to all men."² It is not, however, by giving his time to the works in question, that he will attain this desirable object. His mental character will only be deteriorated by their enervating influence. They will tend to impair both the inclination and capacity for solid intellectual exertion. It has been urged in their defence, that they will open to him a more extended view of human nature. But this will be much more effectually obtained by comparing the scripture statement with his own daily experience and observation. Another argument in their favor is, that they afford a useful key to the character and manners of society. These, however, for the most part, are sketched with no very skilful hand. They might with greater accuracy and less expense of time, be collected from some of the masterpieces of authors not professedly religious. In short, considering that the Christian part of the community has so much to do, and so short a space to do it in, it must ever be matter of regret, that so large a proportion of their time and talent should be expended in making idlers and castle-builders.

'But we turn our regard to the careless and gay. We are called upon to observe the effect of these publications upon their minds. We are reminded, that many young persons of lively imagination and warm feelings, who would scarcely look into a serious book, may be tempted to peruse these lighter works and derive benefit from the perusal. I admit the first part of this proposition, but deny the conclusion that is drawn from it, except in a few, a very few instances, which are to be regarded rather as exceptions than as a general rule. Rare, however, as these instances are, they are by no means to be despised. They indicate that every narrative of this description must not be included in one sweeping condemnation, not pronounced entirely useless, since the sovereign

¹ This is rather a questionable affirmation. *The general knowledge*, which our Authoress admits to be beneficial to the Christian in the service of others, is of considerable advantage to himself. It enlarges his own mind. It throws much valuable light upon the contents of the sacred volume. It not only qualifies him to expound it to others, but it enables him to elucidate many of its difficulties for his own satisfaction, and extends his views of its intellectual and moral, as well as spiritual treasures. Miss Graham's own case may be placed in opposition to her statement. As to *Religious Reading*, though an indiscriminate or disproportioned indulgence of it is most injurious to our simplicity and establishment in the Gospel; yet the writer may be permitted to observe, (discarding all reference to himself,) that the labors of the pen as well as of the tongue, have been honored as a means of abundant edification to the church of God. See R. E. Bickersteth's *Christian Student*—a most valuable development of the principles and obligations of Christian knowledge.

² 1 Cor ix. 22.

grace of God will occasionally use even them for its purpose. But they do not prove the necessity of sending forth such immense shoals of these productions, that one would think they were designed to supersede and swallow up every other. A few would answer the purpose just as well. Even while I concede thus much, I am inclined to ask—‘Do you not in a measure *create* the taste, to which you profess only to *accommodate yourselves*? Will not this indisposition to all solid and valuable reading be exceedingly encouraged by your indulgent connivance?’ I much doubt both the lawfulness and expediency of this mode of decoying people into religion. I fear that the quantity of good which flows from it is greatly overbalanced by the quantity of evil. The religion inspired by such reading is of a doubtful nature. There is more of earth in it than of heaven. A young person, whose tears flow over a professed novel, is in no danger of mistaking the excitement of feeling for the fervor of devotion. Not so with these ambiguous compositions. Romance and religion are so allied, that we may suppose the latter of these to be embraced, when in effect her presence is only tolerated for the sake of her fascinating companion. Dressed in the sober garb of truth, she will too probably be rejected by those, who permitted her to court them under the bewitching veil of fiction. And is it for the sake of exciting this spurious devotion, that we run the hazard of destroying the correct and simple feeling of the rising generation, and encourage the prevalence of a style of writing, which can never rise into genuine sublimity, or fix itself upon a basis of native solidity and strength?’

This extract will be generally admitted to mark considerable power of writing and of thought. The subject demands much accuracy of discrimination to place it in its true light. To proscribe works of imagination in the mass would include a much wider sweep of condemnation than novels religious or irreligious. It would banish from our reading much that is not merely purely innocent, but intrinsically valuable; and seal up the fountain of much elegant and instructive literature. We might indeed adduce Dr. Chalmers’ writing, for the proof, that the corruption is in the application—not in the faculty—of the imagination, which was given, like every other faculty, for the service of God and of his church. But an infinitely higher authority meets us in the Divine parables of our great Teacher, immediately acting upon this most valuable faculty for the illustration and enforcement of his important truths. And this example is the more to our purpose, as fixing the limit and direction, as well as legitimating the employment of fiction. The imagination is placed in immediate contact with plain and sober truth; while it derives its primary interest, not from its own representations, but from the truth which it was intended to exhibit.

With all these allowances, however, the general introduction of fiction into the cause of truth, is, as Miss Graham observes, of very doubtful benefit; or, even admitting the prospect of usefulness to be

more determinate, it has proceeded very far beyond the necessity of the case. Even in works of a religious character, we are too often caught up into an ideal world of poetry or romance, from whence the descent is somewhat painful to the sober realities of sin and misery—of “vanity and vexation of spirit.” Now minds formed for effective usefulness need to be conversant with the solidity of truth, not with this visionary atmosphere of fiction; while the indulgence of this artificial character fosters a baneful spirit of excitement: generates a distaste for well-regulated studies; creates a taste for novel reading of a more detrimental character; weakens the habit of self-control, so essential to the strengthening of the intellectual and moral principles; and brings a habit of sentimentalism into the religious profession, in the stead of simple and practical spirituality.¹

The most effectual remedy against this existing and unfruitful indulgence, is to fill up the time with those solid pursuits, which leave no room, while they mortify the taste, for works of doubtful utility; and to bring our intellectual recreations to the test of the Scripture rule, which Miss Graham on a former occasion so justly inculcated, for the proof of the legitimacy of our principles and enjoyments: “Whether ye eat, or drink, or *whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*”²

We conclude this selection from Miss Graham’s writings and correspondence, with an abstract of ‘Letters on the Duties of a Governess,’ a series of which she had contemplated for the use of her young cousin, then looking forward to this important and most responsible situation. She commenced her plan during her last illness, and with great difficulty wrote two letters in pencil from her dying bed. Though too incomplete in thought and style for publication, yet her manuscript will afford some interesting illustration of Christian principle, and many valuable suggestions of general instruction for the use of those young persons who are now filling, or who are prospectively anticipating this interesting station in the domestic economy.

These letters appear to have been one of Miss Graham’s last efforts for one, whose best interests formed one of her most tender ties to life. After commencing with the most affectionate expression of her deep-toned anxiety for her, she thus proceeds to remind her of her Christian responsibility.

‘The great wish of my heart for you,’ she writes, ‘is—not that you may be a very learned or accomplished governess, (though these are highly valuable considerations in their place)—but that, possessing as large a measure of these things as your means and

¹ Many works of fiction may be read with safety; some even with profit. But the constant familiarity, even with such as are not exceptionable in themselves, relaxes the mind, that wants hardening; dissolves the heart, which wants fortifying; stirs the imagination, which wants quieting; irritates the passions, which want calming; and abandons, disinclines, and disqualifies for active virtues and for spiritual exercises. The habitual indulgence in such reading, is a silent, mining mischief.—*Hannah More*.

² 1 Cor. x. 31. Comp. p. 424, 430.

abilities will allow, *you may be truly and decidedly a Christian governess*. For, oh! my dearest —, *yours is a charge of souls*. The spiritual welfare of your pupils is subordinately committed to your care; and at your hands will the neglect of this solemn trust be required.¹

In this first preparatory letter she is chiefly occupied in inculcating upon her cousin the Christian principle of faith in Christ, in all its detailed application to the circumstances, trials, and encouragements of the situation of a governess.

‘I can only offer my advice to you as a Christian. I know but of two states to which children can be brought up; for heaven or for hell; for time or for eternity. I am departing out of time; and knowing that both for you and them, time soon shall be no more, I dare not go upon any system but one fitting for souls born for immortality. Every word, then, that I write, must be on the supposition that the glory of God, and the eternal happiness of your pupils, are your first aim; and that every other object, however praiseworthy in itself, is only secondary and subservient to this one grand object of a Christian teacher’s existence.

‘I exhort you to enter upon the new and arduous duties of your situation, “*looking to Jesus*.”¹ Remember that he is “the author and finisher of your faith;” that you cannot stir one step without his aid; and the moment you begin to look off from him to any other object, that moment will your steps begin to slide. Fix your eyes, then, steadily upon him. “As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so let your eyes be upon the Lord your God,² in all times, in all places, and in all circumstances.”

‘And first, I earnestly recommend you to “*look unto Jesus*” in *your choice of a situation*. Pray constantly for Divine assistance and direction on this most important subject. This implies that you intend to seek for a situation among God’s people; for I suppose you will hardly ask God to give you any other. You may deem it unlikely that you should obtain a situation in so limited a sphere. But your dying friend would remind you—“The God who has led me all my life long,” never forsook me upon any occasion, when I put my trust in him. The word of truth assures you, that “He has never forsaken *any*, who put their trust in him.”³ Nor will he forsake you, if you commit your way to him on this important occasion. From Abraham’s time until now, the Christian’s motto has ever been—“The Lord will provide.”⁴ Only “rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct thy paths.”⁵ I charge it upon you, beloved —, as my dying, earnest wish, that you take every proper means to obtain a situation among decided Christians; and that, *as far as it may be in your power*, (for I know that it may not be always possible

¹ Hebrews xii. 2.

² Psalm cxxiii. 2.

³ Psalm ix. 10.

⁴ Gen. xxii. 14.

⁵ Psalm xxxvii. 7, 8. Prov. iii. 6.

for you to direct your own conduct) you join yourself to those who "are not of the world,"¹ and to no others. An established Christian might go in faith under the clear guidance of Providence, into a worldly or irreligious family; and (if the parent would allow of her interference) she might be made a blessing to the whole family. But such a step, *wilfully taken*, would be a serious—perhaps a fatal—injury to an undecided Christian. In a vast multitude of cases, the natural consequence of *choosing* a lot among the children of this world has been, that indecision in religion has become indifference; indifference has terminated in aversion; and the wretched professor has shown herself openly on the side of the world, tormented with the sting of her former convictions, and vainly contrasting her worldly mirth with "the voice of rejoicing and salvation," which she had heard "in the tabernacles of the righteous."²

'On the other hand, a situation in a truly Christian family will cover you from many worldly temptations, and afford you many important opportunities of marking the beauty and happiness of religion. Under a kind Christian mother, you may be directed and encouraged in extensive usefulness to your pupils, while at the same time you are receiving valuable advantages for your own mind. Under all circumstances, be assured that you will find the blessing of taking the first great step of your life—"looking unto Jesus."

'*"Look unto Jesus" also, for strength to perform the duties of your situation.* These you will find to be many and arduous, such as in your own strength you can never rightly perform. The more correct and enlarged your view of those duties, the more readily you will sink under them, unless you can "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." But remember, "you can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth you." "His grace is sufficient for you;"³ and his encouragement is—"Ask, and it shall be given you." Let a sense of your continual need stir you up constantly to apply to him for his aid, not only in your spiritual duties, but in your teaching, in your studies, in the very least and meanest of your employments. Thus "out of weakness" you will be made "strong." You will not soon "be weary in well doing; for they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength."⁴

'*Look to him for counsel in the difficulties of your situation.* Remember that he is not only your strength, but your "wisdom." When your path is so intricate and perplexed, that you know not which way to turn, then ask the Lord to "lead you in a plain path;" to "order your steps in his word."⁵ In every little, as well as in every great perplexity, follow David's rule to "inquire of the Lord."⁶ The advice of friends is ever to be sought and valued; but that of the kindest and wisest may sometimes be insufficient or erroneous,

¹ John xvii. 25.

³ Ephes. vi. 10. Phil. iv. 13. 2 Cor. xii. 9. Matt. vii. 7, 8.

⁴ Gal. vi. 9. Isa. xl. 31.

² Psalm cxviii. 15.

⁵ Ps. xxviii. 11; cxix. 133.

⁶ 1 Sam. xxiii. 2, 4, 9—12. 2 Sam. v. 19, 23.

or given in a harsh injudicious manner. But the Lord giveth not only advice, but "wisdom, liberally and without upbraiding."¹

"*Look unto Jesus*" for comfort and encouragement in all the trials and disappointments of your situation. The life of a governess is peculiarly subject to *little daily crosses and vexations*. These, as well as greater ones, are to be borne, by laying them upon Jesus. No burden is too great or too little to be cast upon the Lord. A cheerful looking unto Jesus, an assurance that he ever loveth and ever careth for us, will bear us through many petty annoyances, which sometimes wear health and spirits much more than real and great grievances.

Lastly, "*Look unto Jesus*" for a certain reward upon your labor. You have a promise—"Train up a child in the way he should go; and, when he is old, he will not depart from it."² Ask for patient, earnest faith, to plead this promise importunately, incessantly with him. "All the promises of God are yea and amen to us in Christ Jesus;"³ and while we pray for, we ought to expect their fulfilment. "He is faithful that promised."⁴ The great Sower will assuredly watch over the seed that is sown in faith, and will bring it to perfection. You may labor day after day for the souls of the children under your care, and yet see them as careless and unconcerned as ever; but look steadily unto Jesus; tarry contentedly the Lord's leisure; "for in due time you shall reap, if you faint not."⁵

In her second letter she enters into a detail of some of the pleasures and discomforts of the life of a governess. Under the former head she remarks:

"The life of a governess, however dull and monotonous it may sometimes be thought, has many pleasures of a very refined and superior nature. Among the first of these, I reckon the *usefulness and importance of the task in which she is daily engaged*. Compare the recollections of a day spent to some valuable purpose, with the reflections which follow one that has been frittered away in trifling and vanity, or absorbed in selfish gratifications; and you will see at once, if you know it not already, how great the pleasure of usefulness must be to every rational thinking being. But to the Christian, this is not only pleasing, but necessary. It is his pleasure and delight to lay himself out for the glory of God, and the good of his fellow-creatures. For this he is content to "wait all the days of his appointed time;"⁶ and much as he longs for the pleasures that are prepared for him above; yet if his abiding in the flesh be needful for the sake of one living being, he would not "depart," even "to be with Christ."⁷ I know of no employment in which a Christian woman can be more profitably engaged, than in watching over the spiritual and mental improvement of children. The young beings intrusted to her care may form the comfort and delight of parents, brethren, husbands, friends, children. They may grow up

¹ James i. 5.

² Prov. xxii. 6.

³ 2 Cor. i. 20.

⁴ Heb. x. 23.

⁵ Gal. vi. 9.

⁶ Job xiv. 14.

⁷ See Phil. i. 23, 24.

to be happy in themselves, and blessings to society. Above all, they may be so many "jewels" added to the Redeemer's crown, and may themselves "turn many souls unto righteousness." To be the instrument (under God) of the smallest particle of this good, must be inexpressible delight.

Nothing invigorates our progress so much as encouraging prospects of success. This is the undoubted privilege of a teacher of youth. Not to speak of those promises of God, mentioned in my last letter, and which of themselves suffice to make us "against hope to believe in hope,"¹ the human probabilities of moral and intellectual improvement, from which God permits us to draw encouragement, are most enlivening. To reform the manners, to eradicate the prejudices, to correct the tempers, of those whom age has matured, and set as it were in the form which they must afterwards retain, is indeed a most difficult task. But with the young, where we have to form instead of to reform, to prevent rather than to eradicate: patient instruction, and unremitting watchfulness, will, in ordinary cases, succeed to a very considerable degree. And though divine grace only can subdue their evil tempers and dispositions, human means may do much towards restraining that outward violence, which so so often makes young people not only wretched in themselves, but an occasion of sorrow to all connected with them. The same advantage is connected with Christian grace and improvement. The minister preaches with holy earnestness to his adult congregation: but it is to the young of his flock not yet hardened in sin or in worldly habits, that he turns with peculiar hope and encouragement. To this comparatively tender and unoccupied soil, he consigns his seed, in the cheerful confidence that it will spring up, and bring forth fruit to perfection. These are the hopeful beings with whom you will have to deal; and as youth is the season of hope and expectation, so is your task peculiarly one of hope and glad anticipations.

In the attachment of her pupils, a kind governess finds another perpetual source of pleasure. This you are almost sure to obtain by a habit of considerate and affectionate intercourse with them, especially if they come under your care at an early age. It is delightful to be beloved by those, whom we have thus bound to us by the cords of gratitude and love. For the justness and clearness of most of their notions; for their ability to discern what is good, and to enjoy what is delightful and intellectual; for all their knowledge and many of their pleasures, your pupils will probably (if you conduct yourself according to my hopes) be indebted to you. They will scarcely ever fail to manifest warm attachment to one, who has so many claims on their gratitude. They must love their faithful adviser, their kind and intelligent teacher, their cheerful, entertaining companion, and their affectionate and sympathizing friend.

¹ Rom iv. 18.

' *The improvement of your own mind is also a source of inexpressible delight.* A conscientious governess will be perpetually and delightfully improving herself. While explaining subjects to her pupils, her own views become clearer; while she is teaching them facts or words, her own recollection of them is refreshed and strengthened. The arrangement of her knowledge for the use of her pupils is of the highest advantage to herself. She must learn to think clearly, that she may be able to express her meaning clearly to her young and ignorant auditors; and if her own acquaintance with the subject be obscure, imperfect, or superficial, the attempt to teach will soon discover it to her, and compel her to correct it. Thus her previously acquired knowledge will be more solid and permanent, while she will be continually adding to its store. Often she may not be able readily to answer her pupils' questions. Further researches, therefore, on her part are necessary; and thus the demands of her teaching stimulate to perpetual increase of her attainments.

' I mention one more privilege connected with the life of a governess. Next to the improvement of her own mind, and indeed *because* of the improvement that it yields to her own mind, *is the pleasure of gaining an insight into the minds of others, into the human mind in general.* In cultivating a flower-garden, there are few pleasures equal to that of watching the tender buds, as they unfold, one by one, their beauteous petals. How delightful is it to admire the wisdom of God, who teaches them to peep in due season from their mantle of green; bids the sun to clothe them in all the colors of the rainbow; and endues them with shapes so varied, and so perfect, that the little flower has been the joy and solace of man's breast in every age! But what is this to the pleasure of watching the mind of a little child, as those faculties which lay wrapped within its tiny folds begin gradually to expand, each in its order; every day witnessing the drawing forth of some new idea, or the unfolding of some latent power? And at a later age to watch those powers and faculties, as they daily improve and strengthen; to see the unformed and untaught child, grow up before your eyes into the graceful, refined, and intellectual woman; to mark every step by which it is effected, and to be yourself employed as an instrument in effecting it; all this is a source of such continual and ever-varying delight, that to my mind it amply compensates for the tediousness and fatigue of teaching. And then there is the pleasure of watching, not only different faculties, but different minds; of comparing their several degrees of development, and the peculiar combination of faculties, which constitutes the formation of each peculiar turn of mental temperament. You may probably find among your pupils many instances of this endless variety; the more quick and ready mind; the lively and imaginative; the clear and decided; the solid and steady; the strong, the deep, the energetic, the inquiring, the contemplative. You will find that each of these will develop itself in a peculiar manner, and put forth their several

powers and faculties with different degrees of vigor and perfection. As an intelligent gardener, in order that his different flowers may open and expand to perfection, exposes them to every degree of air and heat, and treats them with every variety of soil; so will you find the most varied modes of treatment necessary in assisting the development of your mental blossoms, and in contending with the defects peculiar to each. These will be gradually suggested to you by experience; and will assist you much in combating the defects of your own mind, which the course of your teaching in a watchful habit of self-inspection will bring before you. And as the child is but the copy of the man, you will thus be better enabled to discern the intellectual beauties and defects of those with whom you converse. The dull and prosy cease to be wearisome, while we are easily employed in inquiring into the causes of their imperfections, how they might have been, or might still be corrected.

The *advantages you will gain in watching the tempers and dispositions of your pupils* will be yet more valuable and important. This, however, is a less pleasing task. The fall of man, though it has made shipwreck of every mental faculty, has still left the wreck as it were, the sadly obscured and mutilated remains of what was once so noble and beautiful. But our tempers and dispositions it has totally perverted. To study the varieties of the natural heart, is but to study selfishness and pride, in all the various forms of virtue and vice, which they have assumed for the delusion and destruction of mankind. Yet, the high importance of this study, with the word of God for our guide, will fully compensate for its painful disappointments. If God gives me life and strength, I shall again have occasion to touch on these points; I will therefore leave them now, and proceed to some of the disadvantages connected with a governess's situation; not to discourage you, but to prepare you, if I can, in some cases to avoid, in others, to meet them cheerfully.¹

Her exhibition of the discomforts of the life of a governess shows much good sense and knowledge of character in the true spirit of Christian sympathy. The most delightful characteristic, however, is the habitual bent of her mind, ever turning, like the magnetic needle, to the point of attraction. Thus, in the first inconvenience that she mentions, *the separation of the governess from her own domestic circle*—she naturally draws out an application, which seems to say with the church of old—"Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?"¹ 'This grievance,' as she justly observes, 'is often lighter than is anticipated. Strangers cannot live long in the same house without ceasing to be strangers; and where there is a due proportion of encouraging kindness on the one hand, and of respectful confidence on the other; friendship will soon take place of strangeness and reserve. This is particularly the case, where both parties are sincere Christians. The love of their common Lord begets such

¹ Canticles iii. 3.

feelings of union and sympathy between them, that the hand of fellowship is soon held forth and accepted, as if they had long known and loved each other. They know so much about each other, of which the rest of the world is ignorant; they feel themselves so much of "strangers and pilgrims upon earth," that they cannot but rejoice at meeting with a fellow-sojourner, who, like themselves, "has no continuing city, but seeks that better country,"¹ to which their own steps are directed. Added to this general feeling amongst the Lord's people, the Christian mother may surely be expected to receive with peculiar interest and affection the young person whom she has engaged to assist her in bringing up for God those dear objects of her love, for whose temporal and spiritual welfare she cries unto Him night and day. Even should you fail of obtaining this privilege; should your employers be ever so cold and distant; still the affections of your pupils conciliated to you by affectionate and judicious treatment, will be objects of incessant interest to fill up the void in your heart, in the consciousness of loving and being loved. And I think that a teacher of youth thus blessed and encouraged will seldom be inclined to reckon her condition very desolate or forlorn. But even should this comfort be denied you (a misfortune I hope and trust very unlikely to happen in your case), I have to remind you of another source of consolation, which can never fail or disappoint you. If you now give yourself to Jesus, you can never be wholly amongst strangers; for your best, dearest friend—one who is "born for adversity, who sticketh closer than a brother"—is with you, yea, and has promised to be "with you to the end of the world."² And oh! what a friend and comforter is Jesus! How abundant in loving-kindness! How tender in sympathy! How rich in counsel! How "meek and lowly" in reproof! How wise to direct! How mighty to help! How slow to anger! How ready to forgive! What a faithful, unfailling, promise-keeping friend!

Against 'the feeling of afflictive solitariness'—a measure of which, under the most favorable circumstances, must belong to absence from the happy family circle—she suggests the following alleviating considerations. The Christian turn which she gives to the first suggestion is exquisitely beautiful:

'*Think first*, what a common privation it is. Almost every family disperses, as the younger part arrive at maturity. One son perhaps remains at home to support his father's declining years, and to fill his place when he shall be no more. The others betake themselves to distant parts, and are often content to look forward to a re-union in ten, twenty, or thirty years. The daughters probably marry, and accompany their husbands to remote situations, from whence they return once in a few months or years, to visit the still dear party at home. This you will say is an unfair comparison. For the happy young wife goes with her husband,

¹ Hebrews xiii. 14; xi. 16.

² Matthew xxviii. 20.

who is more to her than all the friends of home ; and she is soon settled in a new home ; and surrounded by a family and friends still dearer to her than those she has left. True, my dear — ; and this is what I wish you to bear upon your mind in every trial you may have to encounter. The happy wife misses not the home of her youth ; because, wherever she goes, she carries with her that which is better to her than home ; and her pleasures now are superior to those she has relinquished. And thus the devoted Christian, whether married or unmarried, has with her, wherever she goes, the cheering presence of one, who is far dearer to her than husband, parents, brothers, sisters, or friends. She has made her home in the bosom of her God and Saviour. Thither she flies for sympathy and direction. In that kind bosom she can pour forth her joys and sorrows, far better than to the tenderest relatives or friends. She has nothing “in heaven besides her God, nor on earth any she desires in comparison of him.” She must feel as a stranger even in her own home, if it be composed of such as know not the name of Jesus ; and wherever that beloved name is known and esteemed, there she is happy and at home. Go where she will, she cannot journey to the place where God is not ; go where she will, she is still drawing near to that home, on which her thoughts and affections are fixed.

Another ground of alleviation is very pointedly and sensibly set forth.

“This painful separation from home, is in reality (under present circumstances) the best and happiest thing for you. Were two situations equally eligible to present themselves, and were I asked to assist you in your choice, assuredly the one near home would not be the object of my preference. A continual recurrence to the comforts and liberty of home, makes every little restraint and discomfort of a situation doubly irksome and annoying. The poor governess, who has the misnamed privilege of perpetual access to her home, returns from it in no very favorable mood to a place where she cannot (at least at first) be loved, caressed, and appreciated, as amongst her own friends. It is but too natural, that she should consider every little departure from the unlimited and perhaps injudicious indulgence, which she has just experienced, as an actual deviation from the law of kindness and equity ; that she should magnify every real or fancied slight into contempt, every expression of disapproval into a harsh reproof, and every degree of strictness in requirement into an unreasonable exaction. Soon the very nearness of her home tempts her steps thither again. There the well-filled budget of petty trials and vexations, which few young persons have the wisdom to conceal within their own bosoms, or to tell to none but God, is emptied out before partial relatives, who hear but one side of the story, and are too apt to take it for granted, that there is no other way of telling it. They cannot refuse to sympathize and console ; and while they are wondering that such an attention was omitted, such a fault found, or such a duty ex-

acted, they little suspect themselves to be the cause of the forlorn and disconsolate state of their dear relation. Nor does the evil end here. Her mind divided between her pupils and home, cannot fully and affectionately employ all its energies in the service of the former. Too often will her absent looks and languid attention betray the fact so injurious for pupils to discover, that her mind can wander as well as theirs; and that their improvement and entertainment are objects which soon slide out of her thoughts, when occupied by subjects of more pleasant contemplation. Nor have I yet made the obvious remark, that the time lost in these frequent visits, however short, must deprive her of many opportunities of private improvement; and thus prove in the end extremely detrimental both to herself and her younger charge. From these considerations, a moderate distance from home is far preferable, from whence at stated and proper intervals you are permitted to revisit your friends. And I think that such reflections as these might enable us to bear the discomforts even of a long separation from home, not merely with patience, but with thankfulness.

‘I cannot quit this subject without strongly cautioning you, not too hastily to accuse the parents of your pupils of being unkind or unreasonable, because they are not willing to grant you leave of absence whenever you think fit to ask it. They, perhaps, with more justice, may think the unreasonableness to be all on your side. It is both right and natural, that they should anxiously desire the improvement of their children in every branch of instruction to which their attention has been directed; and they know that this is only to be attained by a steady course of persevering application. They know that every interruption to this course must have a pernicious effect, by weakening habits newly formed, and permitting old and bad habits to revive; by unsettling the mind in all its pursuits, and blotting out much of what has been already learned. If, therefore, they oppose your absence, it is because they value your services too much to part with them lightly, or without sufficient cause. There are few cases in which you ought not to submit to their decision. But the best way to prevent any future misunderstanding or disappointment, is to make some arrangement before you enter upon your situation.’

The *frequent change of situation, or the liability to this change*, is well pointed out as a serious evil attending the life of a governess.

‘Her duties,’ it is observed, ‘are becoming easy and delightful to her; she is beginning to rejoice in the growing attachment of her pupils; she feels that she can look round on their little faces with a degree of maternal affection; when some unexpected cause induces or compels her to relinquish her situation. She has long been employed in clearing away the rubbish; in laying the foundation; and in collecting and arranging the materials of her intended superstructure, which was beginning to rise with a daily increasing order and symmetry. This state of things might probably appear rude and unfinished to the eye of others; but it was full of hope and

interest to her, who had been watching its progress from day to day, and confidently awaiting the happy, though distant completion of her labors. Her work must now pass into the hands of another, who neither witnessed its commencement, nor can be aware of many important points connected with its progress. The new teacher, however, succeeds to all the benefits of that preparatory drudgery, with which her predecessor had hoped to pave the way for her own future exertions. It seldom happens that the children are not seriously injured by this change of system. The very act of changing has a tendency to unsettle the mind. The new comer's manner, her new mode of expression, and new system of teaching, must render her at first less intelligible to them, than the familiar voice to which they have been accustomed; and till this disadvantage is conquered, her services must prove less effective. Besides, too often the new governess, confident of the superiority of her own methods of instruction, hastily puts aside the rules and arrangements of her predecessor—not because they are not good, but as if they could not be good, because they were not her own. Then the children also are discouraged and thrown back in many of their studies, that they may be grounded in them on the new system. Perhaps ere long another change is determined—a new teacher comes—and the best methods are displaced by others that are newer and better still. The result of this broken and interrupted education will be a sort of clumsy patchwork, made up of a medley of fine and coarse materials, ill-contrived, ill-assorted, and loosely put together. These are some of the real injuries inflicted on children by the frequent change of domestic administration.

‘My chief concern, however, is with the governess. In addition to these mortifying circumstances, she is again thrown upon the world. She must once more take up her abode amongst strangers; her pupils are again unfamiliar to her; she must study their tempers; conciliate their affections; examine and arrange their present acquirements: in short, she must encounter anew every former difficulty. And when all this is effected, and things begin to glide smoothly on, another change, another loss of time and labor, may yet be in prospect for her. The web may be again unravelled; the stone, that had been heaved half-way up the mountain, may roll down again to its very foot. I have dwelt strongly on the evils resulting from a frequent change of situation—not by way of discouragement, but of warning. I am persuaded that, in a large majority of cases, young people might and would retain their engagement in one family much longer than they do, if only they would calmly sit down, and count the serious cost both to themselves and to their pupils, (to which I have alluded,) in relinquishing it.’

It would be difficult in all cases to determine what might be deemed a sufficient reason for relinquishing a situation. A few decidedly insufficient motives are accurately specified.

‘I need scarcely suggest, that a trifling increase of salary would be an insufficient reason for quitting a tolerably comforta-

ble situation. Circumstances, such as some urgent family call upon your assistance, might indeed render a change not only excusable but praiseworthy. But without an imperative call, it will be equally your interest and happiness to retain your station. I consider the governess, who will abandon her young charge for the mere sake of a little paltry emolument, much in the same light as the minister, who will leave his larger flock for the same base motive of "filthy lucre," without any clear providential call. This abandonment of present and certain usefulness for the sake of something new and uncertain—whether dictated by the love of gain, or the love of novelty—is not only sinful but imprudent. You are now more or less comfortably settled. You know not how many discomforts may await you in a new situation. You leave those who probably are becoming attached to you, for those who at present neither know nor care anything about you. This is not the way to lay up friends against the time of sickness, distress, or age. The plain path of duty is always the path of prudence. Here only can you expect the "blessing of the Lord, which maketh rich; and he addeth no sorrow to it."¹ When, however, any tempting offer occurs, the love of gain, so common to all, the love of novelty so inherent in young minds, and the persuasions of older sordid friends, are too likely to prevail with a young person, who is not enabled to hold fast her integrity, by working with a single eye to the service of Christ.

'Nor do I think that any trifling inconvenience should induce you to relinquish an engagement which holds out to you a fair prospect of usefulness. Every situation has its trials and privations; and it is better, if possible, to put up with those which already fall to your share, than to run the risk of incurring others which may be worse. Besides, these petty hardships are always most severely felt at first. After a time they wear off, and at length cease to occasion any considerable uneasiness. When the temper of either parents or children is a trial to you; when the parents, through pride, avarice, or inconsideration, fail in a proper attention to your comforts; when the extreme retirement or excessive bustle of your situation makes it very unpleasant to you, &c.—in these and many other similar cases, I should advise you to make as light of the evil as you can, and to bear with it as long as it can possibly be borne with.

'Again—let not any sudden fit of despondency induce you to give up your situation. There are few teachers, who cannot recollect a time, when everything seemed to go wrong with them—'No children ever repaid the trouble bestowed on them so little; no situation ever possessed so few advantages; no parents were ever so exacting and dissatisfied. In any other family they should succeed better; here they can neither do justice to their pupils nor to themselves.' Such feelings, which may be expected to arise in

¹ Proverbs x. 22.

times of difficulty and discouragement, mark something very wrong in your own heart, that casts a shade upon all the objects around you ; something that needs—not the indulgent experiment of change of situation—but a special course of self-examination, watchfulness, and prayer, to restore a healthful tone of energy, cheerfulness, and satisfaction to your mind.

‘ I need scarcely observe, that *no offence, real or fancied*, except *the former* be of a very clear and aggravated character, *could justify you in quitting a family*, in which you may have probably received much kindness, and may receive much more. A governess must expect to be told of her faults, and ought to be thankful for such information as may lead to their correction. Christians indeed too often perform the difficult office of reproof in a very harsh and grating manner ; forgetting that the reproof of “the righteous should be like excellent oil,” not to “break,” but to heal, the wounded spirit.¹ Yet the harshness with which a censure may be given, forms no excuse for a defect of Christian meekness and love in receiving it. “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry ;” but remember that “a soft answer turneth away wrath.”² Indulge not that sensitive temper, which is always looking out for some ground of offence, over which it can brood, till it bursts out into open discontent ; which bristles up at every light and unguarded expression, and is always on the defensive, even when no intentional slight could have been conceived. You will never long retain a situation without a forbearing spirit in respect of many little things, which are grating to a proud and self-conceited temper. Good sense and experience *will indeed help to depress this baneful temper*. For we can scarcely so far shut our eyes to the passing world around us, as to fail in discovering, that the good opinion we may have formed of ourselves is ill-warranted by the general estimation in which we are held ; and that we must expect our full share of inconvenience and neglect. *But true Christian humility can alone conquer the evil*, “by bringing into captivity every high thought to the obedience of Christ.”³ The spirit and temper of which we have been speaking is ever ready to take fire at the least provocation, or even without provocation. It exacts not only due respect, but much more than, if it knew itself, it would find to be its due. It can bear with nothing ; it can endure nothing. But do you follow after that “charity which suffereth long and is kind ; is not puffed up ; doth not behave itself unseemly ; *seeketh not her own* ; is not easily provoked ; beareth all things.”⁴

‘ To sum up what I have said in a few words—when you have taken up your abode in a family, and have fairly set down to the performance of your duties, remember that you are in the station to which God in his providence has called you ; and that nothing but a clear and explicit call of duty or necessity can justify you in quitting it.

¹ Psalm cxli. 5.

³ 2 Cor. x. 5.

² Ecclesiastes vii. 9. Prov. xv. 1.

⁴ 1 Cor. xiii. 4–7.

‘The causes that might induce your employers to dissolve the engagement (in which case you can have no alternative) very materially depend upon yourself. *Under any ground, just or unjust; of their dissatisfaction with you*, endeavor in the spirit of prayer to sift every part of your conduct, and particularly the part censured, to the very bottom. Put yourself in their place. Make every allowance for the feelings of an anxious parent; and consider what might fairly be expected from you, and how far you have answered those expectations. Under any error discovered, be not ashamed to confess your fault with all candor and humility, and (in higher strength than your own) to promise amendment. To retain your situation by this “voluntary humility” will be truly honorable in the eyes of Christians, who know that “he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”¹ But supposing that, after sincere self-examination, you cannot acknowledge the justice of the censure, still, as a Christian, strive to conciliate. Do not get warm or angry in your own justification; mildly profess your freedom from any intentional offence or omission; and declare your readiness to redouble your efforts to give satisfaction.

‘*Should incompetency be alleged against you*, I should advise you, rather than give up your engagement in despair or in offence, to endeavor by redoubled diligence and application, especially in the particular ground of complaint, to redeem and establish your character. Christian gentleness and humility to explain and conciliate, and a willingness to correct errors, and to supply omissions, will in many cases restore satisfaction and confidence in the minds of your employers.

‘Should however—not any fault or caprice on either side—but some *unavoidable domestic necessity*, dissolve the connection, in this case many mitigating circumstances will present themselves to your mind. In the first place—“*It is the Lord;*” and not one of his appointments or disappointments is without some wise and gracious purpose. In the next place—all painful feeling of responsibility for any evil that may result from the change is entirely removed. And thus supported by a sense of God’s blessing, and a clear conscience, you may look cheerfully forward to your new destination, hoping to gain new friends without losing the old.’

The writer has been induced to quote so largely from these letters, because he is not aware of any work that enters into the details of the principles, characteristics, and sympathies of the life of a governess. Had Miss Graham been permitted to complete her design, her accurate and observant mind would probably have produced a valuable manual for this interesting and important class of society.² In the defect, however, of an entire system of instruction, the pre-

¹ Luke xviii. 14.

² A small volume, lately published,—‘*Letters to a young Governess*, by S. F. Ridout,’ contains much valuable suggestion in filling up Miss Graham’s imperfect sketch.

ceding hints will be found to suggest much sensible instruction nearly connected with their comfort and usefulness.

In the choice of a governess, solid principle is of far greater moment than accomplishment. Let the intellectual adorning have its due weight and consideration. But after all—the formation of the character upon Christian habits of thinking and conduct—and the storing of the mind with useful knowledge—is the primary concern. Where rectitude of principle have been fully proved, instruction may supply many lesser defects—and redoubled diligence and application will,—as Miss Graham observes,—do much to establish the character, as well as to strengthen the tone of mind. We must, however, preserve an even balance in the adjustment of this important part of domestic economy. If the generality of instructors are too flimsily furnished for their great task, perhaps it may be also said, that the generality of their employers are too niggardly. Though Miss Graham rightly inculcates upon her young governess not to consider stipend a primary matter, yet it is a part of Christian obligation to elevate her in a high rank above the menials of the house, and to consider the claims of aged parents or poor relations, that often press upon her. Where there is no power to give the liberal remuneration that is deserved, special care must be taken to compensate by the coin of affection and esteem—to a sensitive and delicate mind more acceptable than any increased pecuniary consideration. Under all circumstances, let it be remembered, that the labor of instruction is an anxious—and with children of lively and untractable temperament—a very depressing task. Let not, therefore, the slight or caprice of parents, or the contumely of servants, be added to their painful privations and sacrifices. It is too often found, that inconsiderate selfishness and formal pride on the part of the parents materially hinder the effective usefulness of the family instructors. It fosters in them a discontented spirit in the contrast with the tender sympathies of their own home. Their insulated station in the family throws them in irksome solitude upon their own resources; contracts their social affections; and paralyzes that affectionate interest in their charge, which is the soul and energy of a fruitful system of instruction. Whereas a considerate tenderness would return to the parents an abundant recompense, in raising up for their children valuable friends in the persons of their instructors—attached to their interests beyond the prospects of sordid gain—wise, anxious, and sympathizing counsellors to the end of life.

On the other hand, personal hindrances too often restrain the disposition of the employers to incorporate the instructor, as far as is consistent with her station, into the family circle; and this, even when a well-furnished mind and general consistency of conduct would have made her society an important consideration. A want of knowledge or respect for the regulations of decorum—defect of manners—forgetfulness of the due reserve connected with her situation—pedantic tone of conversation—vanity of dress—self importance—a disputatious spirit—a love of authority—affectation, or

studied eccentricity of behavior—these or some other failure in the domestic graces—repel the exercise of kindly confidence, and produce a natural, and in some degree a necessary, distance in the deportment of the parents.

Let each side form their mutual behavior upon scriptural rules. Let the one practise the injunction of love—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them."¹ Let the other "be clothed with humility," and be found in the daily observance of "whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report."² Thus Christian regard and happiness will be reciprocally diffused, without any compromise of their several obligations.

¹ Matt. vii. 7. 12.

² 1 Peter, v. 5. Phil. iv. 8.

CHAPTER V.

DIFFERENT VIEWS AND FEATURES IN MISS GRAHAM'S CHARACTER.

THE retired and uniform habits of Miss Graham's life scarcely allow of a detailed illustration of *her natural character*. That singular freedom from selfishness, remarked in her early history,¹ appears to have been, by the common consent of all her intelligent friends, a most prominent feature throughout life. One of her young companions, whose subsequent opportunities of observation give weight to her testimony, thus confirms the general remark on this point:—'The situation which I have filled for some years (in tuition) has of course brought under my notice the various dispositions and peculiar tempers of children in general. From necessity partly, I have studied them. But I have never met with one, who in any degree answered my recollections of Mary Graham. Warm and susceptible in her feelings, she was tender to those of others; nor did she ever suffer any regret or disappointment in her own mind to interfere with the comfort or pleasure of her companions.' The testimony of her young cousin is to the same purport. 'I never saw any one so devoid of selfishness, or who took so warm an interest in the happiness of her fellow-creatures. There was not one of my amusements or childish sorrows in which she would not take her share. As I grew up, her kindness in this respect increased.' This lovely trait was combined with a sweetness and gentleness of disposition, and, being moulded under the influence of divine grace, attracted the regard even of the thoughtless and unobservant. Indeed her young friend first alluded to does not hesitate to assert—'My earliest remembrance of her is connected with feelings of respect, which, I think I may say, I have scarcely felt in a stronger degree for any one I have since known.'

We have already given her parents' account of *her relative character* under their own roof.² In its wider sphere of operation it may, however, be added, that her natural affection was enlarged in no common degree to all that belonged to her, and manifested in the most important and practical mode of constant prayer and effort for the salvation of their souls. She sometimes spent a great part of the night in earnest and persevering intercession; and on one occasion was known, after she had retired to rest, to arise from her bed to employ herself in special prayer, in behalf of her only brother, who died in America about this time, and for whom she

¹ Page 11.

² Ibid.

never ceased to cherish the hope, that her prayers were heard with acceptance.

The following letter fully enforces the claims of natural affection upon the basis of the high principles of the Gospel. In quickening her friend to a self-denying effort in this path of duty, she writes:—

‘Stoke, Jan. 2, 1827.

‘My dear —, “freely we have received, freely let us give.”¹ If it does take up half a day once or twice a month to go to —, surely God, who gave all your days, has a right to expect you should spend them in whatever service he will put upon you; and by making these individuals your near relations, he has given them a claim upon you. Jesus made himself as our brother, that sucked the breasts of our mother, on purpose to give us an everlasting claim to all that he can do for us; and surely those whom he has given us as near relations, have for his sake a claim upon all that we can do for them. The more unpleasant the task, the more contrary to flesh and blood, the more reason we have to hope that we are not following our own fancy, nor working to please ourselves, but really following the example of Jesus, who “came not to do his own will.”² At the same time, if *after prayer*, you really do not feel called upon to do something for them, and that speedily and perseveringly; and if you do not think you are guilty of great unfaithfulness and selfishness in neglecting it, I will not mention the subject again to you; for I am persuaded you will be taught of God, and faith will be given you, if the Lord intends to make use of you to do them good. My great desire is, that we may be always faithful to one another, “provoking one another to good works.”’

In another letter to the same correspondent, she throws out a valuable hint of encouragement relative to a difficulty, which is often painfully felt in this course of obligation.

‘I often think, dear —, that if we could feel and carry in our memory those encouraging words of our Saviour, “It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father, which speaketh in you,”³—we should no longer suffer false shame to hinder us from earnestly pressing the subject of the Gospel upon those who are dear to us. May not we, as well as the inspired apostles, hope for the indwelling guidance of that Spirit, who shall strengthen us in all utterance and in knowledge?’

One main feature of *her intellectual character* was the ardor, steadiness, and concentration of mind, with which she pursued every

¹ Matt. x. 8.

² John vi. 38. Compare Romans xv. 3—the example of the only being in the universe, who had a right to please Himself, and yet who, in relinquishing this right, exhibits Himself as our Pattern no less than our Sacrifice.

³ Matthew x. 20.

object of interest. This indeed distinguished her earliest and most unbended habits. Her youthful games were marked with the same intensity of feeling, which she subsequently applied to her more important objects. She engaged in games of imagination, as one of her companions remarks, with all the earnestness of reality, and acted a fictitious character with an expression, that proved her to be totally absorbed in it. Thus it was with reading or with work. No efforts or entreaties could avail to divert her mind from the object which was then engaging her attention, to any other employment or recreation. In the occupations of after-life, whether it was music, the languages, mathematics, or chemistry, it was still the same warmth and fixedness of mind. The early dawn not unfrequently found her (after she had girded on her Christian armor) deeply engaged in her studies. The spirit and result of her investigations often entered into her common conversation, wherever she met with a kindred mind—not however in any display of pedantry, (than which nothing was more removed from her temper,) but in the natural flow of her spirits, and with a lively endeavor to communicate a reciprocal interest. The simplicity and elastic spring of her mind was also remarkably illustrated in her peculiar faculty of drawing out the mental resources of those with whom she conversed; so that, though they could not but be sensible of her great superiority, yet they appeared to themselves often to possess a greater strength of mind, and variety of conception, than they had before been conscious of. Perhaps however the completeness of her intellectual character appeared in the well-regulated application of her mental powers. To subjects of taste—such as music and poetry—she brought a glow of feeling and of imagination, that quickens the pulse of her readers, and plays upon the passions with an irresistible charm. On the other hand, matters of a graver cast, such as the highly valuable discussions of her mathematical manuscript, are drawn out with the sober accuracy of a reflecting and discriminating judgment. The illustrations that have been given of her musical excitement might almost lead us to suppose that this was the atmosphere in which she lived, and that she could breathe in no other; yet was this fervid enthusiasm disciplined by the apprehension of the preponderance of this indulgent taste above more solid pursuits.¹ Thus was her fine imagination furnished with a proportionate counterpoise in the master-principle of her ever active mind.

As to her Christian character—this highest style of man—that energy of feeling and industry of habit which gave the impulse to her intellectual studies, no less strongly marked the temperament of her religion. Though she had a clear perception that the blessing she sought was a free gift, yet she expected the attainment of it, like that of every important object of pursuit, only in the constant use of the appointed means. She was therefore led to cherish the

¹ See pp. 40, 135.

principles of her Christian profession, in a spirit of earnest and prayerful searching of the Scriptures; and thus was she enabled to exhibit the graces of the Gospel in lovely combination and practical exercise.

In giving, however, a detailed sketch of Miss Graham's spiritual character, we would premise, that it was marked by that variation of feeling, which is so often alluded to in her correspondence,¹ and which, though common to all cases of Christian experience, her remarkable elevation of spirituality rendered more visible than in most other cases. The difference of her feelings was often discernible in her countenance. On some seasons it was irradiated with a peculiar expression of heavenly feature. She was manifestly filled with the love of God, and "out of the abundance of her heart her mouth would speak." At other times it was with difficulty that she could be induced to converse upon religious subjects; and she would turn from them to enter upon topics exclusively intellectual. But this view of her character cannot better be described than in the language of her most intimate and confidential friend.

'I did not notice any infirmity in her Christian character, except the one she herself often mentions—*inequality*. The difference in spiritual feeling was more visible in her than in any other Christian I have known. When in a state of warm feeling, she was more entirely engrossed by the subject than any one I ever met with. Nothing else could interest her. When her mind was less under the influence of heavenly things, the difference was obvious. I do not mean by her giving way to any sinful temper or feeling, but by her conversing with pleasure and interest upon merely earthly things. Nor do I think that at these times she sunk much, if at all, below the usual standard. Ordinarily she rose, I should think, above it.'

The general tone, however, of her habit, both contemplative and active, manifested the habitual operation of a high measure of Divine influence; while her occasional depressions seem not to have sunk her below the ordinary level, and were doubtless connected with those exercises of humiliation described in her correspondence, which will find their response in the hearts of many of her readers.

We now proceed to the chief object of this work, a detailed development of the most prominent feature of Miss Graham's Christian character.

In a compassionate concern for the unconverted, she had deeply imbibed the spirit of her beloved Master. 'I see,' as she writes to a friend, 'more need than ever to pray, not only for the souls of others, but for a spirit of love to souls, and for a sense of their inestimable value.' She had diligently improved the opportunities of her health, in pleading with the careless and unbelieving, and in every exercise of tender anxiety on their behalf. In the chamber of pain and sickness, their awful condition intensely occupied her mind; and the

¹ See her letter, p. 109.

long and "wearisome nights appointed" her, were often engaged in intercession for their souls.

'When first I visited her'—observed the dear brother, who was the privileged attendant upon her sick bed—'hearing of a poor woman in a dangerous state, and unconcerned about her eternal interests, she eagerly inquired of me respecting her soul, and begged me most earnestly to pray for her. She spoke with a peculiar interest, as if she felt what it was for a soul to be lost.' Indeed her minister expresses himself to have been continually struck with her deep tone of anxiety on the state of the parish. If she heard of any that were awakened from a fearful state of stupidity and death, it was always with the most lively expressions of delight. Often was she known to shed tears of joy upon any symptom of hope and encouragement respecting them that were brought before her. She felt the responsibility of every opportunity of addressing her fellow-sinners, whether rich or poor, upon the immensely momentous concerns of eternity; and when unable to seek after them, she longed to bring them into her sick room, within the reach of her solemn and affectionate exhortations; though a restless night was the expected result of this ardent excitement. It was her great desire to bring her whole family, all her friends and neighbors, to Christ and to heaven with her. Though suffering under excruciating pain, and her "soul breaking out with longing desires" for a sight of Christ in his glory: yet, when speaking of the perishing state of sinners, she would say—'Oh! I would gladly live a hundred years, if I might be the means of saving one soul.' Shortly before her death, when in a state of great exhaustion, she begged her minister to pray for an infidel, who had an opportunity of seeing her 'Test of Truth,' as it passed through the press—'Weak as the work is'—she said in her deep humility—'it may prove a blessing to his soul.'

A few extracts from her correspondence will afford striking illustration of the deep feeling of her Christian responsibility and love. The first letter relates to an unhappy female, who had been brought under her notice. Being unable personally to attend to her case, she thus warmly enforces it upon her friend, who was, jointly with herself, interested in it.

'Dec. 18, 1827.

'My chief reason for writing to-day is, that this poor wretched girl dwells upon my mind. You make good reflections, but these very reflections ought to lead us to do something for her. She must be very young; and if we do not make an effort to save her from destruction, I think that we shall indeed have much to answer for. Her not belonging to us, ought to be no excuse for our not concerning ourselves about her. For does she not belong to the large family of lost sinners, to which we once belonged? And may we not be the means of removing her thence into the family of saved sinners, of which God's mercy has made us members? I cannot rest till something is tried. So young, and so brought up,

what better could be expected from her? What should we have been under her disadvantages? I tremble even to think of it; and for very thankfulness we ought to leave nothing untried to save her. She has been also brought under our notice by a peculiar providence, which is, I think, a call to the work.'

To this wretched object of distress, she addressed a letter full of tender and awakening exhortations. To her great concern, however, this messenger of mercy never reached the hands of her for whom it was intended, and who was soon afterwards transported. Shortly afterwards she again stimulates her friend to this work of love, with the solemn impulse connected with the concerns of a never-dying soul.

'Jan. 11, 1828.

'I beseech you to reflect, that on one hand this girl may be a subject of regret to you upon your bed of death. On the other hand, she may be to you a "crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus."

The fervor that pervades the following letter is deeply affecting.

'March 18, 1828.

'But why should I say I have nothing to write about? I am really ashamed of the folly of the last sentence, and of the frivolous temper which dictated it. Yes, my dear friend, if we love the Lord Jesus, we have always a subject of the deepest interest—enough to employ our tongue and our pen, both morning, noon, and night. I would fain make him the subject of our communication here, as I trust he will be the theme of our songs and praises in heaven; and firmly believing, as I do, that there is neither praise nor lasting joy for those who place their happiness in anything short of loving him; can I do otherwise than tell you how very earnestly I wish that you may be led by his grace to make him your all in all? May his Holy Spirit lead us, my dear M——; for, in short, all are sinners, by nature as well as by practice, altogether alienated from God, to whom we can only be "made nigh by the blood of Jesus."¹ Do not let us deceive ourselves in so important a subject. If we are walking in the same way with the world around us, we are not walking in the narrow way which leads to life; nor can we be the followers of that Saviour, "who gave himself for us, that He might deliver us from this evil world."² There is a peace which the world knoweth not of, and a joy, in which all its boasted pleasures are but vanity. This is the peace and joy which I would entreat you to seek after. But you will say to me, 'Why do you recommend it? and why are you so uncharitable as to suppose I do not possess it already?' It is because I know what a great and entire change it requires in the whole heart and character. I am sensible that such is the utter sinfulness of my own heart, that nothing

¹ Eph. ii. 13.

² Gal. i. 4.

but a divine influence could have led me to see anything in Christ crucified that was worth giving up all the world for. And may not the same Divine power snatch you as a brand from the burning, and lead you to the cross of Jesus for pardon and salvation? This is the hope that induces me to venture upon writing to you so freely; and the very affectionate interest I feel in everything relating to you must plead my excuse, if, when I speak of a thing on which your eternity depends, I speak in the strong language which my anxiety suggests to me.'

Some misconception of her correspondent gave rise to the next letter.

'Your letter occasioned me much pain, and, I will add, perplexity. I could not conceive from what part of mine you had discovered that I thought holiness unnecessary to a Christian. My dear friend, I know (for God has said) that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord:"¹ but I know (for God has said it too), that we cannot be holy of ourselves: "we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves;" and, "without me," saith Christ, "ye can do nothing."² As this is not a matter of little importance, but one of life and death, let me most earnestly and affectionately entreat you to make it the subject of unceasing prayer. "If any man lack wisdom, *let him ask of God*, who giveth to all men liberally." "Ask, and ye shall have."³ The Scripture abounds with promises to those who make it the business of their lives to seek God. Allow me to mention one more, which always fills my mind with comfort and peace:—"Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, *when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*"⁴ I have mentioned this way of prayer to you, because I believe we might write about these things forever, without coming nearer to the truth. Prayer is the way of God's appointment; and I never knew anyone *who really prayed earnestly and perseveringly* for Divine teaching, that was not brought at length heartily to subscribe to what are called evangelical doctrines. The Scriptures take away all hope of our understanding these things of ourselves, when they tell us that the "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him."⁵ Foolish indeed does the doctrine of the cross appear to the heart untaught by the Spirit of God; but let the heart be once taught to receive it, and it beholds in it "the power and wisdom of God;" and a person thus taught will feel constrained to make it his great desire, endeavor, and prayer that others may learn it too. Therefore if I could write volumes to you, the little word "pray" should be the burden of them all. By prayer I do not mean the cold thing which worldly people call prayer; I mean such an effort as a man

¹ Hebrews xii. 14.

² 2 Cor. iii. 5. John xv. 5.

³ James i. 5. Matt. vii. 7.

⁴ Jer. xxix. 12, 13.

⁵ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

dying with hunger would use to beg for food; I mean begging as for one's life, being able to say, as David did, "There is nothing in heaven or in earth that I desire beside thee."¹ Dear —, I feel that I have spoken to you with great freedom and plainness: I cannot help it. If I saw a friend on the brink of a precipice, I would try to pull her away from it. I know that all who trust in anything but Christ for pardon and salvation are on the brink of eternal destruction; and can I rest when any whom I love are in this state? I know, too, that unless God is pleased to bless what I have said, you will only think me a fool for my pains; but this is of little consequence. Before another letter can pass between us, one or both of us may have entered into eternity, when every man's foundation that he trusted in will be tried; and it will be seen how miserably mistaken are those who build upon the sand, upon their own imperfect righteousness: while those alone who built upon the Rock of Ages will be safe. May you be one of those! may you flee for refuge to Christ Jesus! trust him for everything, follow him in everything; take him alone for your guide and teacher, and cease to "lean unto your own understanding."

The next letter contains a faithful and affectionate appeal made to a beloved relative under affliction. It cannot fail of interesting the reader, as a specimen of that natural affection, which we have before noticed² under the constraining influence of the principles of the Gospel.

' Nov. 26, 1829.

'How very sorry your letter has made us! I can conceive nothing more heart-breaking, than the situation you are now all in. I entreat you most earnestly, my dearest —, to seek comfort in earnest prayer, for your dear afflicted —, and to try, by every means in your power, to lead him to the same source of comfort. I know he cannot now bear to have much said to him; but a verse occasionally read to him, or a short and affectionate prayer offered up with him, might be blessed by our merciful God to his eternal good. I will endeavor to join my prayers with yours; if it should please God to lead him to the source of all peace, you may one day look back with joy upon this affliction. May it lead you all to flee more earnestly for refuge to the hope that is set before you! Tell my dear —, with my most affectionate love, that I beseech him to think of, and to pray over these words—"Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."³ Surely he may look upon this invitation as peculiarly addressed to himself. If ever there was one weary and heavy laden in mind and body, it is —. O let me implore him to accept the offer which infinite mercy holds out to him: let him cast his weary soul upon the love of Jesus; let him take all his sins and sorrows, and spread them at the feet of one who is *willing* to forgive, mighty to save, a

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 25.

² Page 146.

³ Matthew xi. 28.

present help in *every* time of trouble, to *every one without exception*, who is willing to be forgiven, helped, saved, and abundantly comforted with the comfort which springs from his love, and which is, like himself, infinite and eternal.

O my dear —, with whom I have enjoyed so many happy hours, which will never fade from my memory; from whom I have received such repeated acts of kindness; and whom I love more as a parent than any other relation, suffer me to speak very earnestly to you; and take my words, I entreat you, as kindly and affectionately as they are meant. I cannot but long and pray, that you may “be comforted with the consolation, wherewith I myself have been comforted of God.” I have tried it, dearest —: and I have tried the comfort which the world has to give; and I have found the one deep, and satisfactory, and lasting, and the other vain, and empty, and transitory. You are, as I am, a sinner, a miserable sinner; and unless you flee to Jesus for refuge, you cannot escape the wrath of God, which is revealed against all sin. You have lived in the neglect of these things, and have cared too little what would become of your soul. But is this any reason for despair, or even for discouragement? Oh! no. Christ still *invites*—nay, even *beseches*—you to come to him; and tells you in his word, that he is perfectly willing, and perfectly “able to save all that come unto God by him.” The greatness of our sins need not prevent us; for his “blood cleanseth from *all* sin:” he died for sinners, even the *chief* of sinners. Our ignorance need not dishearten us; for he “teacheth sinners in the way.” O come unto this “*meek and lowly,*” this *strong* and *mighty*, Saviour! He is too meek and gentle to reject, and too strong and faithful to disappoint any that come. Dear —, my heart is full. What can I say to induce you to seek peace and happiness in the pardon of your sins through Jesus Christ? It is but asking you to be full of happiness and joy; for thus I know it will be with you, if you take the God of all comfort for your God. And do but think, how wonderful and unspeakable his condescension, in offering to be our God, and friend, and father; “forever and ever, our guide even until death;”¹ our “everlasting portion and reward.” Only think, how dreadful that he should be willing to save us, and we unwilling to give ourselves up to be saved and blessed by him! Can this be your case? It must not—it must not be so with you. You cannot reject the invitations of the Gospel, and say to God, who *beseches* you to be reconciled to him—“No—I will not be reconciled; I will not pray to the God of my salvation:” I am sure the thought strikes you with horror. You cannot rightly seek God without the aid of the Holy Spirit: but you will receive this aid upon asking; for “God will give his Holy Spirit to *them that ask him.*”² May he both teach you to pray, and hear and answer your prayer! May he relieve your suffering body, if it be his will,

¹ Psalm xlviii. 14.

² Luke xi. 13.

and comfort your distressed soul! Amen and Amen.—If my dear —— can bear thus much read to him, you will show it, or read it to him; and let us both pray, that he may know and feel the joy of being united to Christ.’

To another friend she wrote from her sick bed, nearly in the same strain.

‘I lie here sometimes, and think what a poor useless creature I am. But if I might be made the happy means of inducing my dear and kind friend to cast himself, and all his sorrows, and sins, and uneasiness, at the feet of the Saviour of sinners, then I should think I had indeed lived to some purpose. I have often wanted to write to you: but the fear that you would think me unkind or assuming in intruding my thoughts upon you, has prevented me. But what a foolish and wicked fear this was, when the salvation of your precious soul was in question! Yes, my dear ——, I will frankly own to you, that the sickness of your body, distressing as it is to me, afflicts me not half so much as the sickness of your soul. I greatly fear that you have not yet found peace in the pardon of your sins through Jesus Christ. I write to you *as a sinner* saved by God’s grace, *to a sinner*, whom the grace of God, and that alone, can save. I would not be so cruelly heartless as to flatter you, and to say, “Peace, peace, while there is no peace.”¹ But I do know that there is pardon and peace too, for every one, who feeling his sins to be many and grievous, flies to Jesus Christ for refuge; and it is thus that I conjure you to fly to him.

‘O my dear ——, how long has this gracious Saviour been knocking at the door of your heart! By his Scriptures, which you have read; by the sermons and religious books that have come into your hands, by the secret strivings of his Spirit with your heart and conscience; by the afflictions wherewith He has afflicted, and still afflicts you; by all these things he knocks, he sues for admission. He will not let you rest till you open the door: and why? because he loves you: he would make you happy in this world, and happy forever. He would be to you a friend, on whom you might safely lean: on whose constant love you might safely confide; one who would never leave nor forsake you; never be weary of nor slight you; never for one moment be unable or unwilling to listen to you, bless you, and relieve you.

‘Such a friend is Jesus Christ to all those who fly to him for salvation. May he be your friend and Saviour forever! this is the sincere prayer of,
M. J. G.’

The tenderness and consideration with which she enforced these supremely-important subjects upon her young friends, is noticed by those who were experimentally acquainted with it. Her gentleness and self-command were often put to the test by the coldness,

¹ Jeremiah vi. 14.

petulance, or dislike with which her exhortations were received. But there was no reproach or upbraiding on her part—no anger or contempt on account of the foolish things that were said; nor did she ever show the less interest in promoting amusements more after the heart of her companions. She was known sometimes to weep in tenderness, when a fault was confessed to her—but never at that time to reprove. Sometimes her humility and affectionate delicacy would rebuke the carelessness of her friend, by the acknowledgment of her own coldness and neglect. Thus she would lead her more thoughtless companion to unite with herself in supplication for pardon and grace. So truly was she “a fellow-worker with her God,” in “drawing with the bands of love!”¹

Connected with this was her *tender and Christian faithfulness in giving reproof*, where she considered it to be needed. To a beloved friend, complaining to her of a trial in the unjust suspicion of a relative, she exclaimed, ‘Oh, my dear friend, it is all self; examine yourself; see if that idol self is not at the bottom of all this feeling of yours.’ The result of self-inspection confirmed this judgment. The following is an instructive specimen of the mode and spirit, in which this high obligation of friendship will be most effectually discharged. After giving a slight sketch of some of the leading doctrines of the Gospel, she brings them home in a direct and close application to the conscience of her friend.

‘And now, beloved —, let me turn from every other consideration to yourself, and the state of your own mind. For you have rightly judged that I cannot think that the state of your —, or any other person, ought to have the least influence in preventing you from seeking the salvation of your own soul. The question is not, what *do others* do to be saved? But “what *must* I do to be saved?” You tell me that I am severe. Indeed I would not willingly be so. A miserable sinner myself, saved only by the free mercy of God, what right have I to be severe upon others? But I am “affectionately desirous of you” in the Lord Jesus, and therefore, as my beloved friend, I warn you. I fail in my duty to you, unless I tell you the truth. It may seem harsh to appear to have any doubt of your state; but it is kinder to lead you to examine now, than to leave you to the bare possibility of finding yourself deceived when it is too late. If then what I am now going to say should seem to you more severe than ever, I entreat you, dearest —, to forgive me for the sake of the motive which impels me to do so. Consider that I am not now speaking of any trifling thing. The more I love you, the more impossible I find it to stand upon ceremony, while I am trembling for your soul. My fears then about your state are not excited by what I have heard. Had you become a very decided and devoted Christian, I think I should have heard of it from many quarters. In some it would have been noticed with delight; in others, with wonder: in others, with dislike and disap-

¹ Hosea xi. 4.

probation. But my fears are drawn chiefly from the querulous and worldly strain, in which most of your letters to me are written. I know that "if you have not the Spirit of Christ, you are none of his." This Spirit must be known by its *fruits*. "And the fruits of the Spirit are *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*"² Now I look earnestly, *anxiously*, for some of these fruits. I look for some sign that "the love of God is shed abroad in your heart, by the Holy Ghost which is given to you." This love would show itself in love to others; in love even to your enemies, if you had any. But I fear you are indulging in feelings little short of hatred to more than one of your fellow-creatures. I fear that wrath, strife, disputations, envyings, jealousies, are too often more predominant in your heart than love. Again I look for some evidence of that "joy and peace in believing," that "peace and joy in the Holy Ghost," which form so great a part of the "kingdom of God" within us.³ Even mourning Christians must *sometimes* feel a little of this in their hearts. But sure I am, that if "the peace of God which passeth all understanding, did keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus," you could not be so much fretted and discomposed by the petty discontents, and trials, and offences of a world, whose frowns and whose smiles you would feel to be equally beneath your regard. You would remember that your lot has been chosen for you by a wise and loving Father, and that the most vexatious events in it happen by his permission, and for your good. Whenever we feel inclined to murmur, dear —, at "our light afflictions," let us think of those faithful servants of God, who "had trial of cruel mockings, and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments; who were stoned, were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword, who wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented."⁴ Yet these "destitute, afflicted, tormented" ones, "in patience possessed their souls." "The peace of God kept *their* hearts and minds;" and shall it not keep *ours*, in our comparatively no-sufferings? Now if these "fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace," flourish in the heart, they must show themselves to be there: and if the contrary dispositions—anger, dissatisfaction, restlessness, appear in their stead, it proves either that "we have not the Spirit of Christ, and therefore are none of his;" or else that we have "grieved that Holy Spirit," and caused him for a time to withdraw his sacred influences. In either case we ought not to rest till we have sought and obtained that "godly sorrow" for sin, "which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of."⁵ Where we may apply for this repentance, we are told in Acts v. 31. I will go on no longer in enumerating these fruits of the Spirit; for my business is not to judge you, but to lead you to judge and examine yourself. This I earnestly entreat you to do, "that you may not be judged of the Lord."⁶

¹ Rom. viii. 9.² Gal. v. 22, 23.³ Romans xv. 13; xvi. 17.⁴ Heb. xi. 36, 37.⁵ 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11.⁶ 1 Cor. xi. 31.

And should you now, dearest —, feel offended with me, it will give me the less uneasiness—both because I know you will not in the end love me the less for having faithfully discharged my conscience towards you before I die; and because I know that you will view it in a very different light at our next meeting, which will, I hope and trust, be around the throne of God and the Lamb.⁷

Her love to her Saviour must have been already prominently remarked by every intelligent reader. She lived much in distinct, deep, and fixed contemplation of him. Those parts of Scripture were especially valuable, that brought her into closer contact with the subject nearest her heart—the *love of Christ*. The book of Canticles was therefore to her “a garden of delights.” Her pure and spiritual mind enabled her to study this holy book with the liveliest and most profitable interest. Many Christians, in an over-scrupulous delicacy and unscriptural taste, seem almost to have proscribed this portion of the sacred canon from their private meditation. The book indeed is an exposition of the heavenly privilege of communion with our divine Saviour. It can only therefore be understood by those who can say—“Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”¹ The perusal of it moreover must be admitted to require a peculiar abstraction from earthly things. But the Christian’s heart under Divine teaching will be a spiritual interpreter of it; and whenever it is approached with reverence, simplicity and sanctity, it will tend much to the enkindling of holy affections in the endearing contemplation of condescending love²—in a self-abasing sense of backslidings³—in a heavenly enjoyment of the presence of the Lord⁴—in commending his person to all around us⁵—in a panting desire for a closer communion with him⁶—and in a joyous anticipation of his coming.⁷

But Miss Graham’s *love to her Saviour* was not confined to spiritual contemplation. It was a principle of incessant activity, directing her daily habit (to use her own beautiful language to one of her correspondents) to ‘watch with the eye of love every intimation of his will, every leading of his Spirit.’ Such is the difference between speculating upon religion, and feeling it—when the heart has “tasted that the Lord is gracious”—when the man is made “a new creature”—when his eyes have been opened to behold the beauty of his Saviour—and he is anxiously cultivating every temper of the Gospel, in which he may live above the world, and walk with Christ.

Miss Graham’s happy anticipations of eternity were connected with this *love to her Saviour*. That which gave, in her eyes, emphasis and perfection to eternal bliss was—that it is all Christ—that the “Lamb is the light”⁸ of the heavenly city. Thus we find her writing a new year’s congratulation to a dear friend in the heart-stirring remembrance—that “now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”⁹

¹ 1 John i. 3.

⁴ Cant. ii. 3—13.

⁷ Cant. verse 14.

² Cant. i. 1—4.

⁵ Ibid. v. ix. 16.

⁸ Rev. xxi. 23.

³ Ibid. v. 2—6.

⁶ Ibid. viii. 6.

⁹ Rom. xiii. 11.

‘Stoke, Jan. 1, 1827.

‘This time last year we were together. Does it seem as if a year had passed since then? Another year of sin on our part, and of mercy, free and uninterrupted, on the part of *our* Jesus! There is something very sweet in the thought that we are a year nearer to his bosom; that every year will pass as swiftly as the last, till he calls us to himself; and that nothing can happen next year, or any following year, which can possibly separate us one single moment from his love. Perhaps this time next year we may be like him, “seeing him as he is,” joining in a song new indeed to our tongues, because it will be a triumphant song, and a holy and an everlasting song.’

Her love of prayer formed one of the main features of her character. Every habit of her mind appeared to flow in the spirit and atmosphere of prayer. *The playful exercises of her youth were indulged in this sanctified temperament.* When her cousin visited her, the day was usually commenced with a chapter from her favorite Bible, accompanied with prayer, that they might both love and serve Him, of whom that book testified. This service performed, she instantly turned all the warmth and animation of her affectionate temper, and all the powers of her highly-gifted mind, to the amusement of her companion. We have already noticed *the connection of this habit with her intellectual employments*, whether indulging her own gratifications, or superintending the instruction of her cousin.¹ Hers was not the unsanctified study, which is glitter, not gold. All was consecrated to the supreme object of life, and directed to this object by the constant influence of that principle, which ennobles earthly occupations, and stamps them with a heavenly glory. *The occasional visits of her young friends* found her in the same spiritual habit. ‘Seldom,’ as one of her school-fellows has recorded, ‘did I enter her little room, but she proposed the reading of the Bible, and would pour out her soul before her God with holy fervor and simplicity.’ *Her public exercises of Christian devotedness* were conducted in the same spirit. When engaged in the work of Sunday School tuition, she had her set times of prayer with her young cousin, who was at that time associated with her (for themselves, their fellow-laborers, and their responsible charge); and frequently she would offer distinct and separate supplication for each child in their classes. *Her responsibility as a member of the ransomed family of God*, led her (as we find from a letter shortly to be adduced)² in the true spirit of sympathy to devote an hour every evening mainly to the subject of intercessory prayer. Besides these constant occasions, *she set apart special time for secret dedication and communion with God.* New-year’s day and birth-days were among these privileged seasons. It was one of her favorite plans to set apart occasionally a certain time exclusively for prayer and scripture reading; and for

¹ See page 37.

² See page 183.

this purpose all her other employments were removed from her sight. This was her preparation for any special engagement that was prospectively before her; and this course she recommended to her friends with beneficial effect.¹ Another custom of somewhat similar character (and one that is happily making advance throughout the church in our day) was to prevail upon her confidential friends to set apart definite hours, when distant friends could meet together in one heart and one soul at the throne of their common Lord. Thus in the most extensive meaning of the scriptural precept, she might be said to "pray without ceasing;" and, like the man after God's heart, "to give herself unto prayer."

Love to the whole word of God was also a prominent feature in her character. Indications of this holy pleasurable taste were visible in her childhood, in the large portions which she committed to memory.² In an early excursion with one of her young friends, we find her reproaching herself for the small proportion of time, which she had consecrated to the study of this precious volume. Whatever might be the ground for this self-accusation, it was however intended as a hint to her less thoughtful companion, and to introduce before her a plan that might be useful to them both—that of repeating portions of Scripture to each other when they met. Thus she made her own self-condemnation the vehicle of instruction to her friend. Generally speaking, she read the Sacred Book as a pleasure, not as a task. It seemed to be her constant food and study. She did, indeed, "esteem the words of God's mouth more than her necessary food."³ They "were found, and she did eat them; and they were to her as the joy and rejoicing of her heart."⁴ They were to her what Melancthon calls 'that sacred manna of the soul, to which St. Paul alludes, when he speaks of spiritually discerning' the sacred pages. Often under protracted bodily and spiritual trials, the promises were to her "as cold waters to a thirsty soul;" yea, as "life from the dead." So eager was her appetite for this heavenly manna, that, not satisfied with her own gathering, she was always longing to feed upon the fruits of the industry of her friends. Thus in one of her letters we find her entreating her confidential correspondent to communicate to her any additional and interesting light, which had been found in the course of her scriptural research. Even in those seasons of special consecration just alluded to, when she found her mind indisposed for spiritual reading, she would still cleave exclusively to the Scriptures, and give up her time and mind to learning large portions of this holy book. It was her practice to read through different books of scripture with a close and persevering habit of meditation and prayer, always keeping in mind her Master's stimulating motive to the

¹ See a reference to this plan in her letter, p. 47. In another letter she again alludes to it—"I have made a proposal to—. I wish her to read a chapter in the Testament every day, beginning with the Gospel of St. Matthew. I will every day read the same chapter, and (God helping me) give some time to pray, that every verse may be explained and blessed to her. I hope much from this method.

¹ See p. 12.

² Job xxiii. 12.

³ Jer. xv. 16.

search—"For they are they which testify of me."¹ Hence she was delighted in the course of her study of the Book of Proverbs, to have Christ so much and so frequently brought before her mind;² a recollection of great moment for the spiritual discernment of the divine wisdom treasured up in this storehouse of practical instruction. The encouraging promise held out to diligent investigators of the sacred volume³ on one occasion fixed her in intense meditation for upwards of two hours. She appeared to be lost in astonishment and gratitude at the condescension and kindness of God, in giving a promise so rich, so free, so encouraging. She grasped it, as if determined not to let it go. She frequently employed herself in the profitable exercise of "comparing spiritual things with spiritual;"⁴—Scripture with itself; thus making God his own interpreter. Much light and heavenly unction she conceived herself to have obtained by this means, which were manifested to others, unconsciously to herself, in her striking remarks, and apt illustrations of passages presented to her. The *wholeness* of her study already noticed⁵ is worthy of careful consideration. There was no exclusive regard or undue prominence given to portions of the sacred book. "All" was regarded as "given by inspiration of God;" and therefore profitable for the specific purposes for which it was written, and which it is the exercise of prayer and diligence to investigate.

But we will state her admirable views of the temper requisite for the study of the Sacred Book in her own words.

'We shall never—she remarks—'become perfectly reconciled to all parts of the word of God, until He himself bestows on us the spirit and temper of a little child, to receive, without murmuring or disputings or carnal reasonings, whatsoever *Jehovah the Spirit* is pleased to say to us. That Spirit alone can take away the evil heart of unbelief, which prevents us from embracing the *whole* counsel of God as revealed in his word. It is he that must open our hearts to attend to *all* the things written in his law. *Then* we shall perceive a connection and a harmony between every part and every doctrine of the Scriptures, which will fill us with ever-increasing wonder and delight.'⁶

Her child-like simplicity was the spirit of the most profound reverence. It is most edifying to remark her humble adoring search into "the deep things of God," as contrasted with the unhallowed boldness with which these unfathomable depths are too often explored. After noticing objections to her views of the doctrine of election, she checks herself—

'But I stop; "he that reproveth God, let him answer it."⁷ All these mysteries can be accounted for only by referring them to the inscrutable mystery of God's predestination. To the eye of carnal reason they lie involved in the thickest obscurity; but the eye of faith sees in them no darkness at all. For faith, instead of vainly

¹ John v. 39.

⁴ 1 Cor. ii. 13.

⁷ Job. xi. 2.

² See Chap. i. viii. ix. &c.

⁵ See her letter, p. 97.

³ Prov. ii. 1—6.

⁶ Freeness of Grace, p. 55.

striving to pull these things down to the level of reason, soars far above reason; resolves every difficulty into the *gracious will* or *wise permission* of God, and *seeks to know no further*. How many things are there which I know not, nor "can by" any "searching find out to perfection!" But *Jesus knows them all*. With this assurance I sit down, fully satisfied He will teach them to me hereafter, as I am able to bear it. In the meantime "I will trust, and not be afraid." All that my God says to me I will implicitly believe, for I know that "every word of God is pure." "All the words of his mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them: they are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge."¹ When I come to see God as he is, and to "know even as also I am known," I shall find that all these mysteries of his word and will were only 'dark with excessive light.'² In the meantime, till I have the eagle eye that can gaze undazzled at his glories, I will view them at humble distance through the glass of faith, which he has given me for this purpose; nor will I dare to repine, because I can only see them in a glass darkly.² Thus faith removes every objection, stills every murmur, and silences every doubtful thought.³

This "trembling at God's word," is the spirit which our Lord "delighteth to honor"³ with special manifestations of his favor. "The secret of the Lord is with them *that fear him*; and he will show them his covenant."⁴ This temper will stimulate to an earnest and diligent search; while it will repress a presumptuous intrusion. It will lead to the reception of every truth upon this formal reason—that *it is the word of God*. Every truth, though it should not be considered of equal importance, must be regarded with equal reverence; never forgetting that God is the Author of every particle of revelation. Therefore to reject *any one 'jot or tittle of it'*—as Dr. Owen has excellently observed, 'is a sufficient demonstration, that *no one jot or tittle of it* is received as it ought. Upon whatever this title and inscription is—'The Word of Jehovah"—there must we stoop, and bow down our souls before it, and captivate our understandings to the obedience of faith.⁵

Her love for the ordinances of God is worthy of special remark. And this indeed is the pulse of the soul—not *attendance on them, but delight in them*—fellowship with the panting desires of the holy Psalmist, when he envied even the birds who inhabited the pinnacles of the temple, and the priests who were always employed in its service; and for himself counted "a day spent in God's courts better than a thousand" spent elsewhere.⁶ The house of God had been to her in the time of health "the gate of heaven."⁷ In her time of affliction, ministers and ordinances were to her "wells of salvation," from whence she "drew water with joy."⁸ "Beautiful" in her eyes "were the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that

¹ Prov. xxx. 5; viii. 8, 9.

⁴ Psalm xxv. 14.

⁷ Gen. xxviii. 17.

² 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

⁵ Owen on Perseverance, chap. x.

⁸ Isaiah xii. 3.

³ Isaiah lxvi. 2.

⁶ Psalm lxxxiv.

publisheth peace.”¹ She loved the messengers of the Gospel “for their work’s sake,”² and for their Master’s sake.³ She always expressed the deepest anxiety to receive through them “a message from God” to her soul. ‘*Pray before, as well as after, your visit,*’ was her solemn entreaty to her beloved minister.

We must not forget to mention her “*love to the brethren*”—that conscious and unequivocal mark of a transition “from death unto life.”⁴ She longed to see, converse, and enjoy fellowship with all who bore the image of her Lord; and whether absent or present, she seemed to hold communion with them. Speaking of an absent friend, who appeared to enjoy a deep sense of ‘the love of God upon her heart,’ she said, ‘I long to see her, that she may impart to me some spiritual gift.’ On this subject she appears to have been drawn out with remarkable warmth and liveliness of Christian feeling in her correspondence with her friends. To one of them she wrote thus—‘It is a great honor for us, who have been made partakers of the tempter’s work, to be made partakers of the Saviour’s—for us, who have been made a curse, to be made a blessing. But when I write to you in this way, it is not so much because I feel it, as because I want to feel it, and desire to be made the instrument of “stirring up this gift of God in you.”’

What reader but must long to imbibe the blessed spirit of the two following letters?

‘April 9, 1827.

‘I entreat you to think more of the privilege of intercession, and to make more use of it than ever. I find an indescribable delight in using these words, “Our Father,” and in praising, confessing, and praying for myself as one of this large family—in praying for myself as one of them, and in feeling their joys and sorrows as my own. And indeed if we wish above all things that the name of Jesus be glorified, is it not glorified in the spirituality of others as much as in our own? And if we wish to be one with Jesus, should we not be also one with his elect? Tell me your difficulties and necessities, that I may present them to Jesus with my own. I do not say this, because I think that I have the strength to do it. But Jesus, our God and our Lord (who is with me whilst I write, and who will be with you whilst you read this letter) has said to you and to me, “My grace is sufficient for you.” ‘O Lord Jesus! see what I have written, and show that I do not expect too much from thee. Cause every affection of ours to be absorbed in thee; and may all thy sheep love thee above all, and love one another as thou hast loved them!’ Say—Amen to this prayer. And if you wish to know what to ask for me, ask that a spirit of perfect love, “which seeketh not her own,” may be given me.’

¹ Isaiah. lii. 7.

² 1 Thess. v. 13.

³ Luke x. 16.

⁴ 1 John iii. 14.

Again, about a month after, to the same—

May 5. 1827.

‘I beseech you to seek earnestly “the communion of saints.” This is the only progress I have made in the Divine life. I have received as a most precious and unmerited gift the power of feeling the things of the flock of Christ as if they were my own. You cannot imagine the happiness of this feeling. The means through which the Father has given it to me, has been the Lord’s Prayer. I dedicate (not always, because I am so light and unstable, but generally) an hour every evening to prayer, and principally to intercession. I generally begin with the thanks due to God, for having made himself known to us as our Father, for all that he has done for every one of his sheep on that day. It is impossible for me to tell you the great delight of thus mixing myself up with the people of Christ, and of considering their benefits as my own. The thought which transports me the most, is that of how many souls have been perhaps this day joined to the church! how many succored under temptation! how many recovered from their backslidings! how many filled with consolation! how many transported by death into the bosom of Christ! It delights me much also to consider, that all the elect, who are not yet converted, have been and will be preserved till they are called by the Divine Spirit. I then try to pray for that sweet “we,” and to think of the necessities of my Christian friends. Besides, I have a list of unconverted persons for whom I wish to pray. I do entreat you to study with prayer the thirteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians. I am most anxious that you should enjoy this happiness; and if you ask, you will do so.’

In the next letter we find her mind exercised upon this interesting subject.

‘It seemed to me when I last wrote to you, that the law of love to the brethren was engraven on my heart. But I feel little of it now. It was like writing on sand. Oh! that all the flock of Christ had more, very much more, of this law. Oh that thirteenth of Corinthians! Do read and pray over it. There is love—such love as we want—the whole law written in our hearts. I wish the Lord would give me to say something to stir you up to pray more for love: and then, when you are quite full of love, that he would make you the means of conveying it to me. I would have you pray over 1 John iv. 16—21, as well as 1 Cor. xiii. We must first “know and believe the love which God hath towards us.” That will make us love.’

To another beloved friend she expresses herself with similar warmth and intensity.

“How shall I, who am so full of sin, think to say anything that may be useful to you, my dear friend? Yet perhaps “the comfort

wherewith I have been comforted of God," in trying to spread your sorrows before him, may be communicated to your soul, while I am telling you of it; for blessed be Jesus—we are all one—members of the same body. "It is given us in behalf of Christ to suffer,"¹ and rejoice with one another. When I was trying to pray, I endeavored to think of a verse, which I might plead with God, and which might encourage myself. The Lord put this into my heart—"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word—(for us;) that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, *that they also may be one in us.*"² But oh! the comfort that filled my soul, when I thought that Jesus had lifted up this prayer for you long before you were born! that he has had it in his heart for you (and for me too, and all God's people, who all need it as much) ever since! and he is praying the same thing for us now! and finally *that "the Father heareth him always!"*³ Therefore, the Father has heard, does hear, and will hear, this most gracious petition, which the Lord Jesus offered in the midst of his disciples, and which God the Spirit brought to their remembrance for our encouragement—"that we all may be one, as he is one with the Father." Yes—and we all shall *be one*, though Satan and all his angels conspire to divide us. He can no more separate us from the love of one another, than he "can separate us from the love of Christ." Truly, we have fellowship one with another; and "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."⁴ May you be enabled to use more boldness at the throne of grace, to "draw near in full assurance of faith," and claim what Jesus, *who cannot ask in vain*, has asked of the Father for you—a full and abiding enjoyment of that love to the brethren—that fellowship—that oneness with the saints, which is just as much yours as Christ is yours! It is a part of your purchased possession; and nothing can keep you out of your right, but your own want of faith to plead that right with a God, who is more ready to give than we to ask.⁵

Would that these enlivening sentiments of Christian love were universally diffused! Our Lord's wonderful prayer⁶ on this subject is indeed, as Miss Graham observes, an answered prayer—that is—in its incipient and progressive results. Yet it is only a specimen of that intercession, with which he has pledged himself, that "for Zion's sake he will not hold his peace, and for Jerusalem's sake he will not rest," until his Father shall make his "Jerusalem a praise in the earth."⁷ The plenary blessing is yet in store for us. We want increased exertion and expectancy as a means of preparation for it. We want to change our indolent anticipation of this union perfected in heaven for the immediate personal exercises of faith, patience, forbearance, and humility, by which "our hearts may be knit together in love,"⁸ even in the midst of the incessant

¹ Phil. i. 29.² John xvii. 20, 21.³ Ibid xi. 42.⁴ 1 John iii. 14.⁵ John xvii. 21.⁶ Isaiah lxii. 1, 7.⁷ Col. ii. 1.

conflicts of the church; and we shall then be ready to help each other's labors, and hail each other's success.

The present aspect of the church is indeed most afflicting. We would not narrow the necessary breach between the church and the world by any compromise of principle or of conscience. But how painful is it to "see the breaches of the city of David, that they are many!"¹ When will our Zion appear in "the perfection of beauty"—as "a city compact together!"² "For the divisions of" *one tribe* in Israel "there were great searchings of heart."³ How careful, therefore, ought the scrutiny to be, when the evil spirit appears to be spreading throughout the whole camp! It is not an ideal prospect that we picture to our imagination—but that "good and pleasant sight" to behold of "brethren dwelling together in unity."⁴ Such was the church in her primitive glory, when "the whole multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul"⁵—when "the church—as Chrysostom observes—'was a little heaven.'"

The motives to attempt, as far as in us lies, the restoration of this glory to the church are most constraining—such as fellowship with the spirit and prayer of our glorious Head—his honor in the world exalted by this heavenly spectacle⁶—the Church in every part "edifying itself in love"⁷—the Christian profession established⁸—and the consoling privileges of the Gospel manifested and enjoyed.⁹

The strength to promote this union in the Church will be found in deep self-abasement and wrestling intercession with our God. Let us enter into the spirit of the earnest pleadings of the "man after God's heart" for his people. "O God, thou hast cast us off; thou hast scattered us: thou hast been displeased; O turn thyself to us again. Thou hast made the earth to tremble; thou hast broken it; heal the breaches thereof, for it shaketh."¹⁰ Impossible that "the Lord should" *long* "be angry against the prayer of his people!"¹¹

The *scriptural rules* for maintaining this union are most simple and explicit. "Whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule; let us mind the same thing." "Him that is weak in the faith, receive"—not cast off. "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."¹² These rules are enforced by the example, no less than by the authority of our gracious Head, and directed to the highest end—"Receive ye one another, as Christ also receiveth us, to the glory of God."¹³ Great indeed is the difficulty of holding conscientious differences in brotherly love. We are too apt to magnify the points of difference, while the due proportion of the points of agreement is somewhat obscured. We are more ready to dispute upon the points

¹ Isaiah xxii. 9.

⁵ Psalm cxxxiii. 1.

⁷ Ephes. iv. 16.

¹⁰ Psalm lx. 1, 2.

³ Rom. xv. 7.

² Psalm l. 2; cxxii. 3.

⁵ Acts iv. 32.

⁸ Phil. i. 27.

¹¹ Ibid. lxxx. 4.

³ Judges v. 16.

⁶ John xvii. 21.

⁹ Ibid. ii. 1, 2.

¹² Phil. iii. 16. Rom. xvi. 1; xv. 1.

of controversy, than to strengthen each other's faith and love upon the principles of the Gospel. Thus our inordinate love of our own opinions leads us to press them beyond their legitimate bounds, and even beyond our sober intention; and from this defect of connecting humility and forbearance with faith, many schisms arise in the body.

Would that there were among us one heart and one purpose, to exalt our Divine Master—to let every name be lost in His—to desire no name to be great but His! But the canker of the church is that party spirit—more or less common to all—which unites the several communities upon their own private grounds, instead of forming a rallying point for the whole body. A tame compromise of conscience is indeed greatly to be deprecated. Yet, unless private selfishness, (sometimes cloaking itself under the garb of conscience,) and party Shibboleth be merged in Christian love, no holy brotherly communion can exist. We do not expect brother to yield to brother, but each to submit his conscience to his great Head—each member to grow up into Him, and to recollect that he has some individual sentiment to forbear, from a considerate regard to the unity of the body. It seems to be forgotten that Divine truth in all its parts and connections is fully revealed to none—that the degrees of attainment in scriptural knowledge are indefinitely varied—that every difference in religion, is not a different religion—that there is a want of perfection and singleness in the clearest eye, that is an inlet for the partial introduction of darkness—and that all of us are more or less criminally warped by the school in which we have been trained, by the atmosphere in which we live, or by the difference of our own tempers and habits of thinking. Hence it is evident, that a sincere reception of the first principles of the Gospel lays a solid basis for mutual affection; and that in lesser points “forbearing one another in love,” is the only effectual means of “keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”¹ Indeed, ‘substantial harmony, combined with circumstantial variety,’ (as Paley remarks of the evidence of testimony) is the only practicable catholicity; and to attempt a more entire agreement in detail would be a certain breach in the concord of the universal church. Yet, though unity of opinion is impracticable, unity of faith is to be constantly aimed at; and this may be consistent with a great diversity of individual character, and even with many shades of doctrinal differences.

But let us not be “ignorant of Satan’s devices.”² Too successfully does he succeed by division among the friends of Christ, to prevent the united assault upon his own kingdom. Let us descend from our lesser disputes to the field of the conflict between the great powers of light and darkness. Let us “come to the help of the Lord—to the help of the Lord against the mighty.”³ The voice of God to his church is, “*Love the truth and peace.*”⁴ We love

¹ Ephesians iv. 2, 3.

² 2 Cor. ii. 11.

³ Judges v. 23.

⁴ Zech. viii. 19. Comp. Rom. xiv. 19.

neither, if we love not both. If in the professed cause of "truth" we tear the consciences of our brethren, and wound the "peace" of the church, perhaps we may expect one common storm, one uniting bond of suffering, to be the Lord's appointed means of humbling and chastising his church, and accomplishing his gracious purposes by the instruments of his loving correction.

CHAPTER VI.

HER ILLNESS AND DEATH.

THE period of her illness embraces a large portion of what in her case, as her father observes, 'might not be untruly called, "that long disease—her life."' From her childhood, her health was very delicate; and the long illness which occasioned her leaving school, left a debility in her constitution, from which she suffered more or less to the end of life. Violent pains in her head, chest, and side, appeared however to be the commencement of that disease, which gradually developed a fatal character. For some years she was indeed able to exert herself, (too often much beyond her strength), both in bodily and mental activity. She continued her intellectual studies with her usual vigor, till about a year after her settlement in Devon; when increasing illness constrained her to send her young pupil to school, and she was never afterwards enabled, though she much wished it, to resume the care of her education. From that time she became a decided invalid; and except in the year 1827, (when she changed the scene for the benefit of her health,) she never moved beyond the garden, and only two or three times ventured into the outward air.¹ For the last two years she was entirely confined to her room, and unable to be dressed. During the whole of this period, her anxious mother slept in her chamber, watching over her with the most unremitting tenderness. She generally kept her bed, till within the last seven or eight months, when a violent cough, and spasms in the heart, prevented a reclining position, except when she was compelled to return to it by fainting and exhaustion. The only resource was a chair well supported with pillows, in which she sat up day and night, and from which the assistance of three persons was required to remove her during the last few weeks of her life. She appeared, however, to suffer less from debility than many invalids. For though she was wholly unable to stand, yet a change of medical regimen appeared to give her temporary relief from distressing helplessness.

In this state of wearisome languor and pain, her mind, however, was always vigorous and full of energy. She never seemed to know an idle moment. During the whole period of confinement to her bed, she was always surrounded with books, or other objects

¹ Of one of these times the following memorandum occurs in a letter to her cousin. 'To-day, I know not how, all my illness seems to have disappeared, and I feel much better, so that I have been out in the garden the second time since you left me. Ah! how delightful the weather was; what pleasure I felt in breathing the fresh air, in seeing the trees which begin to bud, the spring flowers which are appearing, and in hearing the song of the birds, who seem to rejoice no less than myself in this season.'

that engaged her attention. It was her habit to have her table placed by her bed-side every night with her books and writing materials, that she might commence her operations with the earliest dawn of light. Her beloved Bible was always under her pillow, the first thing in her hand in the morning, and the last at night. Subordinate to this object of supreme interest, her diligence and perseverance in study were most remarkable. When reminded that such intense application must be injurious to her health, she always replied, that she considered these diversified sources of interest as amongst her greatest temporal blessings, in diverting her mind and attention from her bodily ailments. Her studies in the sick room were as varied as in the time of health. Sometimes the languages were taken up. At other times the more engrossing study of mathematics fixed her mind. This in its turn was exchanged for chemistry or botany. Occasionally, when her mind was less equal to exertion, she would amuse herself with lighter employments. In the spring of her last year, she attempted to dry flowers which her parents procured for her, with the intention of forming an herbarium. But increasing indisposition frustrated this plan. Cutting out paper was also a favorite amusement, in which she early excelled. Her skilful use of the scissors had attracted in her young days the admiration and interest of her school-fellows. She was also a beautiful netter, and sent a number of purses to her Spanish correspondent, which, when sold at a Bazaar for his private benefit, produced upwards of three pounds. Thus in these various employments did her mind maintain its ceaseless activity, both in intellectual indulgence, and in all the exercises of practical devotedness. No opportunity of usefulness appeared to be forgotten. When detained from the house of God by her protracted indisposition, her time and interest were employed in explaining the Scriptures to the servant who was necessarily occupied in attendance upon her; and in one instance it was hoped, as well as in a former case of much earlier date, that her simple and spiritual instructions in the household were applied with divine unction and sovereign grace to the heart.

As, however, her illness evidently approached its termination, her employments assumed a character more exclusively spiritual. She was occupied in girding up her loins, and trimming her lamp, in constant and delighted expectation of her Lord's immediate coming.¹

And now it was, that the Christian graces which had been matured in the school of affliction, and under the influence of habitual communion with her God, displayed more manifestly their holiness, beauty, and consolation. This was (as an excellent clergyman, before adverted to, wrote to her father,) the fiery chariot, her vehicle to heaven, in which—the more it shook her mortal frame, until it left it all behind—the stronger and more full of

¹ Luke xii. 35, 36.

faith and triumph in Christ Jesus, she grew in her immortal spirit.¹

A detailed account of this last period of her mortal career will, it is presumed, be found generally interesting. In these solemn seasons is every feature more accurately defined; while the coloring is heightened by the impressive manifestation of the love and faithfulness of our God and Saviour.

To the last, her habits of active employment were predominant. Her thoughts and time were much occupied in preparing her two small, but valuable works for publication; and she continued to correct the proof sheets of them as they were sent to her till within a few days of her death. At first her mind was divided between the completion of her projected Series of Letters to a Governess; and the work—On the Freeness of Divine Grace. But mature deliberation decided her in favor of the latter, as being calculated for more extensive usefulness. She was indefatigable also in her correspondence with her friends, upon the principle of duty, in using every opportunity of setting forth the grand and inviting subject of the Gospel to her fellow-sinners. She continued to write even after she was unable to use her pen, and when having had just power to direct a pencil, her wrist had been bound up to give her a little strength. The following extracts from her letters, during this solemn season of daily expectancy, mark the character of her mind. We select an illustration at some length of the intense anxiety with which she regarded the spiritual interest of those that were dear to her, and of the earnest, awakening, and yet encouraging application of the privileges of the Gospel, to fix them to an entire devotedness to their eternal concerns.

‘Stoke Fleming, Sept. 28, 1830.

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God!”¹ This love should be enough for us. Come pain, sickness, poverty, affliction; and still the Christian must rejoice, when he considers “what manner of love the Father has bestowed on him.” Reconciled to God; redeemed by Christ Jesus; sanctified, taught, and comforted by the Spirit; what is there in the world that can rob him of his joy? “Who shall separate him from the love of Christ?”² And as long as he has this love, how shall he not “rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory?”³

“My dear——, I would stir up your heart to make this joy your joy. Oh that my God would give me words of power and persuasion, and send them by his Spirit to your heart! “Awake thou that sleepest;” awake, awake. Time is passing—eternity is at hand. Thou must soon receive a crown of glory, “or cover thyself with thine own confusion as with a mantle.” “Behold, *now* is the accepted time. Seek the Lord *now* while he may be found, call

¹ 1 John iii. 1.

² Rom viii. 35.

³ 1 Peter i. 8.

upon him *now* while he is near. Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh unto you."¹ Oh let me remind you, not in a spirit of reproof, but of the most anxious, earnest affection, how long "the goodness of God has been leading you to repentance."² I believe it is now ten years, or nearly so, since we were confirmed together. Then you seemed resolved to make the Lord indeed your God; to be no longer "conformed to this world," but to "come out from the world and be separate;" to walk as "a stranger and pilgrim upon earth." Often since then have you appeared to be affected by the same feelings and desires. The time you spent with me here was marked by one blessed season, during which the word of God seemed to be your delight; prayer to God your chief comfort; and you expressed your entire renouncement of your own righteousness, and a simple trust in the atonement and righteousness of God your Saviour. Recall that precious time to your mind, my beloved friend. You were then beginning to be happy. Inquire how it was, that, instead of "going from strength to strength," from "glory to glory," "from faith to faith," you relapsed so soon into your old uncomfortable state of mind, and have since found so little comfort in religion. Remember that now, even now, Christ is willing to receive you, to give you strength and peace, grace and glory; that he is able to save to the uttermost, and *more* willing to give than you to ask, more ready to hear than you to pray. Consider what an awful thing it is, to go on, for many years, "halting between two opinions;" knowing your Lord's will and not doing it; visited by repeated convictions, yet those convictions producing no decided appearance of conversion. Consider all these things, and again I say unto you. Awake, awake! May God of his infinite goodness arouse you to a sense of the importance of eternal things! May he enable you to wait upon him in incessant and importunate prayer, till he has "blessed you," (as he is most willing to do,) "with all spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ!"

'When you come to die, all the trifles which now vex and disquiet you, will seem less than a drop of a bucket, than the small dust of the balance. But the concerns of your soul, of what immense importance will they appear! Why should they not now assume their real weight and value in your eyes? Death may either snatch you away suddenly, or be preceded by such violent illness, as to render you incapable of reflection. At such a time, how delightful will it be, to be able to lean upon Christ, as an *old* friend, not to seek him as a new one! Oh, my dear —, you *MUST* find time to die; why will you not find time to prepare for death? You must shortly be in heaven or in hell! must feel the happy consequence of being pardoned and accepted in Christ, or the dreadful consequence of remaining in a state of guilt and condemnation. "There is now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus—who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"—who "mind not the things of

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 2. Isaiah lv. 6. James iv. 8.

² Rom. ii. 4.

the flesh, but the things of the Spirit"—who "look not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal"—who "live not to themselves, but to him who died for them, and rose again"—who have "their conversation, their treasure, their heart in Heaven."¹

'Examine yourself, my beloved —, whether you answer to this character. I can write no more now, but as long as I continue in the flesh, I hope I shall not cease from time to time to remind you of these things, to beseech you to give yourself to Christ.

'My health continues much as when — last wrote. I suffer much at night, as I can never lie down in bed, but am obliged to be propped upright in an easy chair. But they do not seem to consider me now in any immediate danger, and if no sudden attack takes place, they seem to expect that I shall live over the winter, or even some time longer. All this is very uncertain; but I hope that I am willing to wait, till my Saviour's time is come to call me home to himself. He doeth all things well; and I may truly say, that he has "made all my bed in my sickness." "His comforts delight my soul;" and "in the night his song is with me, and my prayer to the God of my life is"—"Precious Saviour! Tender Father! Thou wilt cast out none that come to thee."

The following letter, written in the immediate prospect of eternity, is valuable, as an exhibition of those views of the Gospel, which will alone stay the soul in perfect peace at that awful juncture. It is salvation, rich, free, full, finished—not a matter of uncertainty, dependent upon our own efforts or righteousness; but ordained, wrought out, and applied by God—not connected with faith, repentance, and love, as our previous fitness for the reception of it; but including these graces as component parts of the inestimable gift, "afore prepared of God, that we should walk in them."²

' July 5, 1830.

'I find, my beloved friend, that in death no past good works, no holy endeavors or desires can give the least comfort, except as evidences that we have been accepted for Christ's sake. My sole confidence is—that I have cast my poor guilty soul entirely, and without reserve, on the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus; casting far from me every other hope. My good works—where are they? I can remember none. They are too poor to think of without the profoundest humiliation. My desires and endeavors—Oh, my dear friend, I feel I should insult my holy God, by even naming them. They are, indeed, "coverings too narrow for any one to wrap themselves in,"³ at the moment of entering into the presence of God. But my Saviour hath clothed me with his own perfect righteousness, and I wrap myself round in it with unspeakable feelings of security. I examine it on every side, and find it "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." I am not afraid in this my wedding gar-

¹ Rom. viii. 1, 5. ² Cor. iv. 18; v. 15. Phil. iii. 20. Matt. vi. 19—21.

² Eph. ii. 10.

³ Isaiah xxviii. 20.

ment, to appear even before the King of kings. I think I hear my Saviour perpetually saying to me—"Not for thy sake do I this, be it known unto thee; be ashamed and confounded for thine own ways."¹ A sinful worm. May Jehovah, my righteousness, my Tower and Strength, my Rock of defence, my Sun and my Shield, my complete Salvation—Oh may he be your God and Guide, forever and ever!

She was usually favored throughout the last months of her life with a remarkable sense of the divine presence. During times of extreme agony, 'Christ,' she said, 'is with me, "touched with the feeling of mine infirmities."² Her intercourse with God at this solemn season, while it was most intimate, was yet *most hallowed*. One evening, after a day of great bodily suffering, her cousin went into her chamber to take leave of her for the night. The room was darkened, and perfectly quiet; and the state of her soul seemed to accord with the outer tranquillity. She said—"I can scarcely speak to you. The sense I have of the presence of God is so powerful, that it almost overcomes me. He has often manifested himself to me; but never in such a manner as this night. Indeed I feel ready to exclaim with Job—"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee."³ She said very little more, being evidently too deeply impressed to converse; 'but'—her cousin adds—"I shall never forget that night."

Yet this sacredness of feeling was mingled with *cheerful delight*. It was truly Hooker's 'reverend gayety'⁴—"Oh!"—said she one day to a friend—"he gives me to speak to him "face to face;" and sometimes, when I am so weak that I cannot utter words, his "Spirit helpeth my infirmities, and maketh intercession for me with groanings that cannot be uttered."⁵ I love to feel my weakness, that I may experience "his strength made perfect in weakness."⁶ *I delight to lie low before him.*⁷

She loved to speak of the character of God. Her mind appeared to be much expanded in the contemplation of his unsearchable nature and glorious perfections. "How delightful"—she observed on one occasion—"to think, that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."⁸ All his dispensations are light; and though now they seem dark to us, hereafter all clouds will be dispelled."⁹

Her desires for a clear and full knowledge of God were most intense. "What"—she exclaimed one day,—are ten thousand worlds compared with one ray of the knowledge of God! The ardor of her soul, unsatisfied with former manifestations, was continually stretched out for higher and deeper views of the divine glory. She was not afraid to offer that prayer, which seems scarcely befitting an archangel's lips, and which only the clear warrant of the Gospel preserves from the stamp of presumption. "I beseech thee; show me thy glory."⁹ Often did she entreat her minister to pray,

¹ Ezek. xxvi. 32.

⁴ See Isaac Walton's Life.

⁷ 1 John i. 5.

² Heb. iv. 15.

⁵ Rom. viii. 26.

⁸ See John xiii. 7. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

³ Job xlii. 5.

⁶ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

⁹ Ex. xxxiii. 18.

that more might be revealed to her in this world. Nor was the petition unheard. For, in reply to her dear mother's question a day or two before her death, her answer was—'I could not feel happier.'

The concentration of all her thoughts upon eternity was peculiarly striking and edifying to those around her. This main concern for the last few months of her life absorbed her entire interest. Nothing unconnected with it seemed to possess any claim upon her attention. The engrossing delights of intellectual study were relinquished forever. She had no enjoyment of any train of conversation, except that which directly led her mind and contemplation heavenward. Communion with God was the one object of her desire. The word of God now occupied her whole attention. All other books—even her favorite authors—Romaine, Leighton, Milner,—seemed comparatively uninteresting. This heavenly absorption of mind is finely depicted in the following short extract from one of her late letters to a friend.

'Stoke Fleming, Oct. 1, 1830.

'MY DEAR —,

'Knowing that my life hangs upon a thread, I dare not delay answering your letter: I pray God to enable me to speak the truth to you in love, and to dispose you not to think me 'your enemy, because I tell you the truth.' But I *must*, as long as I continue to live, continue to urge you on the subject of religion. I speak not now willingly on any other subject; I desire to have no more to do with earthly things, but to turn my whole joyful expectation to that blessed Saviour, whom I believe I shall soon see face to face, through that infinite, undeserved love and kindness of his, which has taught me to put my whole trust in him for salvation.'

Connected with this feature, we may add, that *she seemed so perfectly weaned from the world as scarcely to have an earthly wish.* Several times she took leave of her beloved relatives. In parting with her young cousin about three months before her death, she writes—'I have not one earthly care or wish; for even my cares for her are now all cast upon God, whose tender love will, I trust, lead her all her life long, as it has led me. She is going one way, and I shall soon depart in another way; but I would wait patiently.' One day earnestly recommending a friend to "cast all her care upon God"—she gave the same expression of her mind—'*I have no earthly cares—no earthly wish.* But'—added she—'I have spiritual cares—spiritual wants; but I cast even them all upon God.' Christ and eternity filled up the whole vacuum, and left nothing else to be desired.

Resignation to the will of God was prominently marked during her illness, and was to her the source of much heavenly enjoyment. After meditating upon her Saviour's words—"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me,"¹—she observed,—'Though *I cannot*

¹ John iv. 34.

now do the will of my heavenly Father, I can suffer his will.' She looked forward with great calmness to a protracted life of suffering, when the medical attendant gave his judgment, that she might probably live for many years, but would never regain her health. As she was naturally of an energetic disposition, ardent in forming and executing her plans, this state of acquiescence to so inactive a life appeared manifestly to be the effect of divine grace. Once indeed she remarked with tears, that the prospect of lying on that bed for many years—of seeing her friends die around her, and those whom she loved remove away (alluding to the anticipated removal of the rector's family, which, however, she did not live to see) was a melancholy thought. But the passing cloud was soon dissipated, and she regained her usual cheerfulness.

The same warm temper of love to the Lord's people that had distinguished her general profession was ruling to the last. Even in her state of distressing weakness, she could not be satisfied without seeing some of them around her bed, that she might enjoy sensible communion with them. However weak they might be in faith, or low in condition, her heart was fervently drawn out in union with them. In referring to some refreshing intercourse with two eminent Christians—she observed—'How good my gracious God is in thus sending his saints to commune with me upon those deep and precious things which now form my only consolation—my "joy and the rejoicing of my heart!"' But—added she, acknowledging the supremacy of her heavenly Friend—'after all, His presence is the only unfailling source of happiness. "With Him is the fountain of life; in his light shall we see light."¹

Her views of sin were deep. Her friend observing her one morning to look unusually disturbed, ventured to express her concern; when she remarked with a look that could not be forgotten—'It is sin that hath made me so. I have passed such a night!' The deep solemnity of her manner precluded any further inquiry. Yet it was afterwards discovered, that it was not her own sin, but that of a dear friend that had so acutely pierced her. Of herself she observed, on another occasion—'Ever since I have known my sins to be pardoned, they have cost me a thousand times more distress than before. So awfully does the love of God, in pardoning, aggravate their guilt.'

The expressions of her deep humility, were peculiarly striking during her illness. All her attainments in the Christian life were never thought of, but as dross and dung. Her sense of unprofitableness kept her low in the dust, while the recollections of faith, exercised in habitual application to the blood of her Redeemer, upheld her from despondency. When her minister ventured to express the advantage, which his own soul had derived from attendance upon her, she exclaimed with vehemence—'How should *such a dead dog*² as I am be of any use?' She sometimes seemed as if she

¹ Psalm xxxvi. 9.

² 2 Sam. xvi. 9.

could scarcely conceive the possibility of being the Lord's instrument for the good of his people, while at the same time she continued to employ her every power of body and mind in their service.

This *self-abasing apprehension was, however, combined with ardent gratitude to God as the author, and to her friends as the channel, of all her mercies.* Every attention, every act of kindness from her parents and nurses, excited the most lively emotions of thankfulness. Speaking one day of the kindness of her nurse, her minister observed,—‘But oh! how kind, how much kinder *is Christ?*’ ‘Yes!’—she replied—‘but even all this kindness of the creature flows to me *through his love, his kindness.*’ Thus did all her earthly comforts receive a double relish—thus also were her bitterest trials sweetened by being traced up to their divine source, and by flowing into her soul through the delightful channel of the mediation of her Saviour.

The same food that had nourished her throughout her journey, continued to supply strength and vigor for the last efforts. Her Bible was more invaluable than ever to her. It was her constant practice before she went to rest, to repeat a text to her beloved mother, and to require one in return—assigning as a reason, that she might have them to think upon when she was gone.¹ She pursued the same habit of scriptural repetition with her affectionate cousin—the constant attendant upon the last months of her illness—adding to it the privilege of social prayer, except when attacks of illness prevented it. “Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full”²—was her favorite text to the last.

As in health, so especially in her last sickness, she had great delight in communion with the Holy Spirit. She used to address her prayers much to Him, thought much of his Personality, and found the contemplation of it most refreshing to her soul. She would often speak with comfort of her experience of his distinct influence upon her heart.

Hymns were also a source of much refreshment to her soul. She used to repeat many to herself, especially during the night, and was thankful to the last to have them repeated to her. The last that her cousin read to her two days before her death, was one by Madame de Fleury, beginning—

‘Ye angels, who stand round the throne,’ &c.

and Gambold's beautiful hymn,

‘That I am thine, my Lord and God,’ &c.

was a great favorite. Cowper and Toplady also were a source of great delight to her.

¹ A few months before her death, she presented her little Bible to her mother, having obtained from her the assurance that she would read a chapter every day with prayer. In order to keep the promise in mind, if the precious treasure was at any time out of reach, she would playfully ask for it, ‘You know, dearest mother, it is not mine now, but do you lend it to me while I am here.’

² John xvi. 24

She expressed to her minister her strong desire to receive the sacrament, the mention of which had been refrained by her friends on account of her great weakness and sudden attacks of violent pain. She feared, however, that she had too long neglected it, and could not be satisfied without the refreshment of this holy ordinance. When speaking of it before the administration—she said—‘Oh! I desire *a full communion*. I long to see as many as possible of the dear children of God to partake with me of this blessed ordinance.’ She expected, as she was justly warranted to do, a rich blessing in the fulfilment of the last command of her dying Lord. Nor was she disappointed. Twice she received the sacred emblems from the hands of the venerable rector of the parish (since departed to his rest); and in the following affecting letter, written in pencil with great difficulty immediately after one of these occasions, she expressed to him her grateful acknowledgment of the consolations which he had instrumentally imparted to her soul.

‘MY DEAR SIR,

‘I thank you very affectionately for the comfort I have received to-day through your means. When I saw you, I regretted that I could not tell you so myself. But it is the Lord, who hath both dulled your power of hearing, and weakened my power of speaking; and he does it with both of us, to warn us gently, that these frail bodies must soon be quite taken to pieces, and lie till we are “clothed upon” with “a body like unto *His* glorious body.” It will give you pleasure to know, that, while you administered the bread and wine, I was enabled to cast my whole soul as a miserable sinner on the free mercies of Him, who died that we might live; and to rejoice in the thought of our meeting ere long, through the same free grace, at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

‘I wished to write these few lines to explain my own feelings to you; for my dear mamma, in her anxious love, so much fears my seeing one, to whom she thinks I could not talk without exertion, that I fear it had never been properly explained to you, that though I feel unable to talk to you, I should be most happy to listen to you.

‘Accept, my dear sir, the Christian love and thanks of your truly and gratefully attached

‘MARY GRAHAM.’

The support which was vouchsafed to her in the midst of her intense bodily suffering, was such as might have been expected from the known and tried faithfulness of her God. Such was her enjoyment at some seasons of agony—that her ‘pains,’ as she said on one occasion, “were sweeter than honey or the honeycomb.” At one of her times of distress she remarked—‘I am a child lying in the arms of Christ, and he treats me with more than a mother’s tenderness.’ Truly, indeed, was she “strengthened with all might,

according to the glorious power of God, unto all patience and long-suffering *with joyfulness*.”¹

It is almost needless to add as the concluding article of detail—*that the sting of death was removed from her*.

‘It is not death to me,’—she would say—‘Jesus hath tasted death for me, and hath drunk up all its bitterness.’ The prospect of eternity was entirely divested of its terrors, and beamed with the bright anticipation of everlasting joy. We may take the following glowing view of her hopes, given for the conviction of one of her young friends.

‘Aug. 7, 1830.

‘I am going to mention a sentence in your letter which grieved me; not as it regards myself, but as it leads me to fear, that you are not fully acquainted with those things, which can afford real and solid satisfaction on a near view of death. You speak of feeling satisfaction in death, as it affords a cessation from all pain. Dearest —, did you remember at the time, that death is something more than a cessation?—that it is an entrance into an eternal world, and that to those who “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,” this is an entrance into eternal glory? Bear with me, while I tell you from my own actual experience, what it is that ransomed sinners rejoice in at the approach of death: I have stood lately more than once on the very brink of eternity, and thought myself on the point of taking the awful step. This makes heaven and earth, temporal and eternal things, appear in their strong and true point of contrast. And now that I am called back to the things of time for a little longer, if I can be of the least use to one of my fellow-sinners and sufferers here, I shall not regret the delay. It is not the cessation from pain, that can make Christians view the approach of death with satisfaction. For, believe me, they have not *one* pain too many. Not that they love pain, or are not glad to be freed from it, when the Lord pleases. But they know that every one of their sufferings is necessary and good for them, and that they come from the hand of a kind and tender Father. They are willing to bear as much pain as His love sees fit to inflict. Their pains are very sweet to them, as they come from Him. And, O dearest —, could you know how he “strengthens them upon the bed of languishing, and how he makes all their bed in their sickness;”² you would almost envy them even their pains, sweetened as they are by “the peace of God which passeth all understanding.” Wherein do they rejoice? In the hope of being “forever with the Lord!” of seeing him, “whom having not seen, they have loved; in whom, though now they see him not, yet, *believing*, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”³ Oh! to behold this “King in his beauty,”

¹ Colossians i. 11.

² Psalm xli. 3.

³ 1 Peter i. 8.

and beholding—to be transformed into his glorious likeness!¹ and then to cease from sin!—this, this is the blessed cessation after which real Christians pant. To love their holy and reconciled God without any coldness or unfaithfulness; to offend him no more by one unholy, or rebellious, or selfish, or unbelieving thought; to be pure as he is pure; to be “without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;” and then to praise Him, to give him glory, and to cast our blood-bought crowns at his feet, through the countless ages of eternity! Pray, my beloved —, that in the hour of death you may be so filled with these causes of joy, that the mere escape from a few bodily pains may seem not worthy to be mentioned in the comparison. The Bible tells you, that “except *you be born again*, you cannot see the kingdom of God,” and that “if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is *a new creature, old things have passed away, behold all things are become new.*”² Examine, I beseech you, whether you have undergone that mighty change in all your views, tempers, and sentiments, which these expressions imply. If you die without being born again, and made a new creature in Christ Jesus, I shall never meet you in heaven; for God, who cannot lie, hath said it. But pray, pray, oh pray to him, that he would thus convert your heart. He will hear and answer you. There is nothing else worth living for, but that, living or dying, you may be the Lord’s. May this be your happy case!

She would sometimes speak of herself as a disembodied spirit; as if she realized in the fullest perception and assurance, her entrance into the world of blessedness. Her frequent reference to her departure was in calm composure—like making preparation for a short journey, or a temporary absence. At other times it was in joyful hope. On one occasion—six months before her death—when she was thought to be dying, she unexpectedly revived, and, seeing her weeping friends around her, asked her dear mother why they were all in tears—adding with great animation—‘Do you think that I shall be with Jesus to-morrow?’ At another of these times, she exclaimed—‘If the Lord should come and take me this night—but, oh!—that is too much to hope for.’ After a violent attack of coughing and spasm, a friend observed—‘I fear you suffer much.’ ‘Oh, no!’—she replied—‘I delight to feel the pins of the tabernacle taking out.’ She burst into tears, when a physician who occasionally saw her, informed her, that the disease had not made the progress which he had supposed. This, however, was but a momentary feeling. For, upon her mother’s reminding her—that she was only not quite so near home as she had expected, she replied—‘Oh, no! this is wrong;’ dried up her tears, and returned to her usual serenity and cheerfulness. Writing to one of her friends in reference to a beloved saint, who had died in the triumph of the Gospel, she remarked—‘Well; I shall have one friend more to welcome me,

¹ Isaiah xxxiii. 17. 1 John iii. 2.

² John iii. 5. 2 Cor. v. 17.

when the Lord's time shall come to "administer" to me also "an entrance into his everlasting kingdom." "Oh, blessed hope! happy sinners! saved by the blood of Jesus." Then she adds this affectionate exhortation, 'Oh, my dear, my beloved friend, I charge you so to devote yourself to the Lord, that "the full assurance of hope" may cheer you now, and at the hour of death.' Upon receiving the intelligence of the sudden death of another Christian friend, she exclaimed—'I have heard the good news. She has rent the veil at once. Mine is taking down piece by piece. By and by I shall find a chink large enough to get out of; like a bird confined in a cage, and fluttering about to extricate itself in vain, till at last the door being open, the happy prisoner wings its flight towards heaven.' There might probably be an occasional mixture of infirmity in these intense desires for her home. It is indeed the dictate of Christian wisdom to prefer the gain of death. But it is equally the part of Christian obedience to embrace the service of life; and the desire to depart, so far as it is not subjugated to the readiness to wait, partakes of the nature of self-will more than of holy affections. Generally, however, the ardency of her desires appeared to be subdued to a resignation to the Divine will. Thus in reference to her dissolution she writes to the aged minister, who, during her residence in London, had been the means of communicating established peace to her soul—'Blessed be my all-sufficient Saviour, that, accepted in Him, a few months more or less can make no great difference: "Neither life nor death can separate us from his love."¹ On one occasion, after expressing her earnest longing to depart, she checked herself and added—'*But I am willing to sit here a hundred or a thousand years, if it be the will of God.*'

Her mind maintained its vigorous character in the midst of her protracted sufferings. The subjects of her conversation were usually of a highly interesting character. She would often speak with considerable clearness, combined with deep humility, of the more mysterious parts of revelation, such as the distinct Persons of the Holy Trinity; the person and glory of Christ: the ministry of angels; the state of separate spirits; the prospects of the Church of Christ. It is much to be regretted that no particular details of these conversations are preserved. The resurrection and future glory of the body were favorite subjects with her. She delighted to dwell upon 1 Cor. xv. 'What a wonderful change'—she observed on one occasion—'takes place in nature in the acorn, which from so small and insignificant a seed afterwards expands and grows into a noble tree, the glory of the forest! What a remarkable transformation also is that of the caterpillar, which, after having been changed into apparently dead matter, at the appointed time bursts its shell, and becomes a beautiful winged insect! Had we not witnessed such changes, we should not have believed them possible. But having seen them in nature, shall we doubt the possibility of that

¹ Rom. viii. 38, 39.

great change, which will take place at the resurrection day, when "this vile body shall be fashioned like unto the glorious body" of our Lord?¹

For a short time, however, before her death, the enemy was permitted to harass her soul, and her lively apprehensions of the Gospel were occasionally obscured. At one of these times she said to her minister, 'Christ is not so precious to me as he deserves.' 'No,'—it was replied—'he is so to none.' 'But'—she added—'he "feeds me with food convenient for me," though I do not experience those spiritual enjoyments I so ardently long for.' Of a distressing season of temptation which happened about this time, her minister writes—'I shall never forget the state of her mind. It seemed as if "a horror of great darkness had fallen upon her."² 'Oh'—she said—'I cannot pray; I can only utter words. It is mere wind.' She earnestly called upon me to strengthen her, by repeating the promises of the Gospel. God at that time seemed to give me words. For when I scarcely knew what to say, words of effectual consolation were put into my mouth. Once in her impatience to hear the word, she exclaimed—'Oh, say something to me from God—whether a word of comfort or reproof.' I think of that proverb—"The full soul loatheth the honeycomb; *but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.*"³ At these times of "needful heaviness, through manifold temptations," while "walking in darkness, and having no light," she was, however, manifestly enabled to "trust in the name of the Lord, and to stay upon her God."⁴ She could not enjoy the full manifestation of her God, which she had known in times past—'Yet though'—she said—'I cannot love God with that warmth which I so earnestly desire, I can act faith upon Him.' She complained much of deadness in prayer. Yet, her faith was in exercise, upholding her soul upon the sure word of promise, that her Lord would return to her in his own best time. She would at such seasons cheer her soul, by repeating suitable promises. "When the poor and needy seek for water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth them for thirst, I the Lord will hear them; I the God of Jacob will not forsake them."⁵ On this encouraging promise she rested in one of her seasons of distress and desertion. At another time she would say—"Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."⁶ And again—"The Lord my God shall enlighten my darkness."⁷ At these times of trial, the book of Canticles was much upon her mind. "By night I sought my Beloved, but I found him not." Then she added—'but I sought not in vain.' She appeared to be at this time much enlivened in speaking of her Saviour as represented under the figure of the bridegroom. 'He loves us to such a degree, that he seeks after us; he desires—he delights in us'—all which is to be seen in this wonderful portion of

¹ Phil. iii. 21.

² Genesis xv. 12.

³ Prov. xxvii. 7.

⁴ 1 Peter i. 6, with Isaiah l. 10.

⁵ Isaiah xli. 17.

⁶ Micah vii. 8.

⁷ Psalm xviii. 28.

Scripture. At another of these times she remarked, that often in the experience of the Lord's servants, a season of darkness had preceded some special manifestation of his love. Thus, as she observed, 'Jacob wrestled *a whole night*; and it was not until the daybreak that the angel revealed himself.¹ Thus for a while our Lord seemed to disregard the cry of the Canaanitish woman; but the "trial of her faith was" eventually "found to praise, and honor, and glory."² Thus also the disconsolate state of the disciples in their journey to Einmaus was the prelude and harbinger of a blessed display of their Master's light and love.³

The dark clouds which "for a small moment"⁴ had been permitted to spread themselves over her soul, were, however, shortly dispelled; and "at evening time it was light."⁵ Her extreme weakness indeed prevented her utterance; but the few words that could be gathered from her, were descriptive of the peace and joy that reigned within. 'My weakness,' she said, 'reposes on his strength—my folly on his wisdom.' When her minister, in allusion to her late painful exercises, observed, 'God was "leading her *by the right way* to the city of habitation,"' she replied, 'Oh! yes—but how different is the case of those, who "wander in the wilderness in a solitary way, and *find no city to dwell in!*"'⁶ In the last visit of this beloved attendant, she said to him, 'God is the rock of my salvation.' Then speaking of her being detained in her earthly tabernacle, she added, 'It is a comfort to think that "Christ has the keys of death and hell."⁷ All is well. May God be with you during the remainder of your pilgrimage! I can only lie as an infant in the hands of God.'

Her bodily sufferings at the last period were most severe, arising from a complication of diseases. Her lungs, which had been supposed to be sound, were discovered after her death to have been fatally diseased. Her heart also was found to be enlarged. Her weakness and inability to recline for so many weeks, produced dropsy in her feet and legs. This was, however, from time to time relieved by incision. Her life terminated at last by a rapid mortification in one of her legs. The last day of her life was a day of intense agony. She was obliged to take doses of opium, which before she could not touch, so that the day and night, till she expired, were passed in a doze, or in the most violent suffering. A few words only were preserved at this affecting crisis. A day or two before her death, she cried, 'Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly; "nevertheless not my will, but thine be done."⁸ At another time, speaking of "the glory that shall be revealed," she exclaimed, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."⁹ Alluding to those who watched by her side, she said, 'What a comfort that we are not watching alone! "He that

¹ Canticles iii. 1. Genesis xxxii. 24, 25.

³ Luke xxiv. 17—34.

⁶ Psalm cvii. 7, with 4.

² Matthew xv. 22—28, with 1 Peter i. 7.

⁴ Isa. liv. 7.

⁷ Rev. i. 18.

⁵ Zech. xiv. 7.

⁸ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”¹ Then again, shortly after, “I know whom I have believed.”² Then again, in a moment of excruciating suffering, to her mother, ‘Pray for me, that my patience may not fail me at the last.’ The last words she was heard to utter before her death in a moment of deep agony, were, ‘I am come into deep waters; O God my rock, “hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.”’ The next morning, on Friday, December 10, 1830, without a sigh or struggle, she entered into her eternal rest.

Thus upheld by the good hope of the Gospel—thus having displayed in lovely concord the diversified graces of the Christian profession—thus having been abundantly refreshed by the consolations of Christ—this blessed sufferer—this ransomed sinner—this victorious believer fell asleep in the arms of her Saviour and her God. She heard, and gladly obeyed the call of her Lord, “‘Come up hither.” Lay down the cross, and take the crown.’

“TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH WILL I GRANT TO SIT WITH ME IN MY THRONE, EVEN AS I ALSO OVERCAME, AND AM SET DOWN WITH MY FATHER IN HIS THRONE.”³

¹ Psalm cxxi. 4.

² 2 Timothy i. 12.

³ Rev. iii. 21.

CHAPTER VII.

REMARKS.

THE writer, in bringing this interesting sketch to a close, ventures to crave further indulgence of his reader, in drawing out a few points of important and suitable application.

I. *The review of Miss Graham's painful, though temporary, apostasy marks the great moment of being well-grounded in the elementary principles of the Gospel.* A few hints may be here suggested to the inquiring and serious mind. First, *the danger of a cavilling temper.* Here lurks the first rising of the spirit of infidelity. Miss Graham's natural character was especially open to this temptation. Indeed, this is the fleshly indulgence of every intellectual mind undisciplined by the principles of the Gospel. It gratifies the love of distinction. It is the worship of self, that worst idol, that most subtle enemy of vital religion. "*Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt,*" is the inspired and pointed illustration of the folly and littleness of this natural principle of the heart. Solid satisfaction and rest in the scriptural revelation will only be found in cultivating what Calvin wisely calls, 'a kind of learned ignorance,'² a well-instructed contentment to be ignorant of what God has forborne to declare. But to begin with the speculative instead of the practical truths of revelation, and to insist upon an explanation of its difficulties, as a pre-requisite to the acknowledgment of its authority, and personal application of its truths—this spirit resists faith, the appointed medium of divine light; and thus gives to infidelity all its force, and leaves the heart the unconscious victim of its own delusions. The more we are disentangled from speculative inquiries, and occupied in the pursuit of scriptural truth, the more settled will be our conviction of the genuineness of the testimony, and our consequent enjoyment of its privileges. Let us not, therefore, trifle with temptation, by suffering the objections of a cavilling infidelity to "lodge within us." Let us

¹ Job xi. 12.

² Instit. Book iii. chap. xxi. § 2. In a subsequent allusion to the subject, he justly denominates the eager appetite for hidden knowledge to be '*a species of madness,*' c. xxiii. § 8. In the same spirit our admirable Hooker remarks—'Dangerous it were for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the doings of the Most High; whom, although to know be life, and joy to make mention of his name, yet our soundest knowledge is, to know that we know him not as indeed he is, neither can know him; and our safest eloquence concerning him is our silence, when we confess without confession, that his glory is inexplicable, his greatness above our capacity and reach. He is above and we upon earth, therefore it behooveth our words to be wary and few.' And again—'That little (of the law of the Divine Government) which we darkly apprehend, we admire; the rest with religious ignorance we humbly and meekly adore.' Book i. § 2.

instantly bring them to the test of conscience, "to the law and to the testimony."¹ Thus let us "resist the devil, and he will flee from us."²

Secondly—we would inculcate an implicit faith in the divine record. And here we trace the source of all the sin and misery, that have deluged the world for nearly six thousand years. God's unchangeable declaration—"Thou shalt surely die"—was diluted to an uncertainty.³ Thus when confidence in the word of God was weakened, Satan's lie easily prevailed. On the other hand, how fully did Miss Graham's unreserved reliance on the promise—"Ask, and it shall be given you"—recover her fine mind to its true position; intrenched upon the supreme authority of Scripture; prostrate in a sense of her ignorance; honoring her God, and honored by him, in a trembling reverential submission to his word!⁴ How many cavilling questions arise in the defect of this spirit! The difficulties which cannot be presently explained are considered reasonable grounds for unbelief. Man under the pretence of a desire to satisfy his doubts, rebels against what he does not understand, and begins to "reply against God."⁵ But in fact we want not more light, but more humility. Herein consists the important difference between the caviller and the sincere inquirer. The one questions, speculates, and is dissatisfied. The other, in the consciousness of his "blindness," is willing to be "brought by a way that he knew not, and to be led in paths that he had not known."⁶ He follows under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth, like his father Abraham under the direction of Providence,⁷ step by step in implicit faith. He asks not—"How can these things be?" But—"Thus saith the Lord" determines all his difficulties without gainsaying. And this practical acknowledgment of the supremacy of Scripture is the just demand of God. We must not, according to the principles of Neology, degrade the authority of his word, by subjecting it to trial at the bar of reason. We must not descend from our high vantage position of faith, to the lower ground of disputation. This inversion of the respective offices of reason and faith casts down God from his throne, and turns our light into darkness. Reason must indeed be exercised in examining the *credentials* of the revelation; for to receive an unauthenticated testimony is credulity, not faith; and scepticism is less culpable than unwarranted belief. But the credentials being once established, we are bound to receive its contents with the most implicit submission. Having once therefore admitted the divine claim of Scripture, we must yield to it our unreserved homage. The question is not—"What thinkest thou?"—but—"How readest thou?"⁸ This is the humility of faith—the child-like spirit of the Gospel—the evidence of the conversion of the heart to God. "Whosoever shall" thus "humble himself as a little child,

¹ Isa. viii. 20.

² James iv. 7.

³ Gen. ii. 17; iii. 3.

⁴ See chap. ii. and comp. Isaiah lxvi. 2.

⁵ Rom. ix. 20.

⁶ Isaiah xlii. 16.

⁷ Heb. xi. 8.

⁸ John iii. 9.

⁹ Luke x. 26.

the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."¹ The enriching light of heavenly teaching dispels many difficulties of the reasoning mind. "If the eye be single, the whole body shall be full of light."² "Sitting with Mary at Jesus' feet," and "learning of our meek and lowly" teacher, we "shall find"—instead of uncertainty, confusion, and wretchedness—"rest unto our souls."

Thirdly—we would impress the importance of a solid experience of the power of the Gospel upon the heart. When the objections against Christianity are fairly answered, the main hindrance to its reception yet remain. There is a strong connection between the speculative principle of infidelity, and the "evil heart of unbelief."³ Unbelief is the disease—not of the understanding—but of the heart. It comprehends the "fulfilling of the desires of the flesh and of the mind."⁴ In the one case it is the love of sin resisting the holiness of the Gospel. In the other case it is (as we have just illustrated the points) the unsubdued pride of the heart rejecting the humility of the Gospel. A full and practical reception of the truth of God is therefore a powerful defence against the subtle and encroaching enemy. It was a defect in this point, that exposed Miss Graham to the baneful influence of her investigating mind. Her early principles of religion, though sincere, were not inwrought in her soul in deep and permanent influence. This unfixed character formed therefore an ineffective safeguard in the atmosphere of powerful temptation. Her neglect of prayer threw her off for a while from her dependence upon God. Her doubts thickened upon her. The strength of her soul was paralyzed. The enemy was at the door, and took advantage of her loss of inward perception to gain a temporary ascendancy. However strong and satisfactory is the external evidence of the Gospel; yet we want the apprehension and proof of its adaptation to our necessities, to endear and establish it to us in all the strength of sensible demonstration. When "the Gospel comes in power, and in the Holy Ghost," then does it come with much assurance. "He that believeth hath the witness in himself."⁵ The transforming power of the Gospel into the divine

¹ Matt. xviii. 3, 4.

² Ibid. vi. 22

³ Luke x. 39. Matt. xi. 29. We are tempted here to give one further quotation from Miss Graham's Manuscript. Speaking of Locke's Doctrines of Intermediate Principles, (i. e. principles established upon acknowledged axioms, as a step to further advance in knowledge,) she adds—"To the confirmed Christian, the Bible is a repository of such 'intermediate principles.' Once convinced that it is the word of God, its truths become the axiom, to which he refers in the establishment of every religious sentiment. They are his data, his well-established propositions, from which he admits of no appeal. He studies their meaning under a divine Teacher, who gives him "line upon line, and precept upon precept." Under his sacred guidance he is enabled to "learn the rudiments of the doctrine of Christ, and to go on to perfection." Heb. vi. 1.

⁴ Happy is the unlettered Christian, who loves his Bible. He is in possession of a set of intermediate incontrovertible principles, for want of which, the wise and learned of this world are thrown back in their researches after truth. He shall "understand more than the ancients, because he keeps the testimonies of his God." Psalm cxix. 100. Nor must the learned Christian hope for an equal degree of felicity, unless he can bring all his human attainments into a blessed subservience to the knowledge that is in Christ Jesus."

⁵ Heb. iii. 12.

⁶ Eph. ii. 3.

⁷ Thess. i. 5. 1 John v. 10.

image is the most decisive evidence of its divine origin ; and this is an evidence which is always present with us ; connected with all our Christian habits of thought and practical life ; and accumulating in weight of testimony, in every successive instance of its efficacy throughout the world. The *unbeliever* therefore (for this is the real character of the merely nominal professor of the Bible) enters into conflict with the infidel at serious disadvantage. He may probably be inferior to his opponent in power of reasoning, and subtily of argumentation. He may be unfurnished with a distributive view of the historical evidence of the Gospel, to repel the attacks that are made upon it ; and, being unable to strengthen his points by the demonstrable evidence of his own senses, he is in great danger of being shaken from the first principles of his faith. Or even supposing him to be on equal terms with his adversary—well furnished with an outward coat of armor ; yet if his interior be not defended by “the whole armor of God,” the poisoned arrows may find an entrance into his inmost soul. If he be ignorant of the spiritual blessings of the Gospel, he can have but a very imperfect conviction of the importance of its principles. They hang loosely about him. There is a want of energy in the grasp to “hold them fast ;” and not being “grounded and settled in the faith,” never having had a real possession of “the hope of the Gospel,” he cannot be secure against being “moved away from” the profession of it. His indecision is the first step to apostasy, and should it proceed to this ultimate point, it is only his just punishment for neglecting to walk closely and humbly with his God. *It is therefore most difficult for him to keep the field at all points* against the infidel upon the lower ground of external argument. For though we protest against the supposition of any vulnerable, or even debatable points on the side of Christianity ; yet the strength of the infidel side, as we have just hinted, bears upon his opponent with mighty influence connected with the appetites of his own heart. Thus man becomes not only a rebel against his God, but a traitor to himself, and the murderer of his own happiness. Living, therefore, without prayer—we should assay to go to the intellectual conflict with armor that we have not proved, and therefore that would render us but uncertain protection.¹ Unexercised in the “faith” of the Gospel, we cast away the only “shield, whereby we could quench the fiery darts of the wicked one.”² In proportion to the practical influence of the principles of the Gospel will be our intelligent conviction of their divine origin. A holy taste will enable us to receive the evidence of Christian truth. In every step of spiritual religion will the invisible realities of the Gospel be embodied and appropriated. The light to discover their external evidence will be thus increased by the removal of a counteracting internal bias ; and the believer, retreating into a heavenly atmosphere of communion

¹ See 1 Sam. xvii. 39.

² Eph. vi. 16.

with God, will be little disturbed by speculative doubts—"Thou art my hiding-place and my shield; I hope in thy word."¹

Lastly—let the mind be informed, expanded, strengthened in its positions by an intelligent acquaintance with some of our most valuable treatises upon the evidences of Christianity—those most especially, that connect the testimony of internal perception with external proof.² Thus covered at all points of intellectual or spiritual warfare "with the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left"³ the simple-minded Christian will "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him, with meekness and fear."⁴

II. *We would mark from this Memoir the high importance of a settled profession of the Gospel.* We have already seen the rich and matured character of Miss Graham's doctrinal sentiments. Hers was not the religion of feeling, (though her feelings were powerfully engaged,) but of solid, intelligent conviction. There was no excitement of impulse or imagination—no love of novelty—but a contentment in solid, scriptural, and practical views of Divine truth. Here was a groundwork for that steady consistency of profession, in which she was enabled to serve her God and Saviour with acceptance and usefulness. It would be a painful investigation to trace the various causes and symptoms of that unsettled aspect of religion, which the present state of the church so largely exhibits. *Too often we find the profession to be of a superficial, and therefore of an uninfluential character.* A susceptible temperament opens the door to self-delusion. The religion of the imagination is substituted for the religion of the heart. Sentimentalism captivates the mind by a sort of confused ideal sublimity. Unorganized excitement is mistaken for solid practical principle. External separation from the world is identified with the spiritual love of holiness. A habit of serious thought and partial reformation is commenced without any defined motive or object. Hence, when the temporary impulse has subsided, the baseless fabric resting upon it begins to shake. The religion of novelty and interest becomes irksome drudgery, without any spring of activity or privilege. The peace and joy, which had been anticipated as the immediate result of a certain train of feelings, ends in disappointment; and the "goodness" which had no connection with tenderness of heart, humility, and faith, "passes away as the morning cloud and the early dew."⁵ The man who had been living upon notions, doctrines, and feelings—not upon re-

¹ Psalm cxix. 114. The following important advice given by a College Tutor to his young men is well worthy of serious attention. 'You should not forget, that the only sure preservative against infidelity is a substantial practical regard to our holy religion in all its principles and duties. And this is that armor of light, in which I wish both myself and you to be clothed, that we may "fight the good fight," and at length "receive that crown of glory that fadeth not away."²—Memoir of Rev. Thomas Lloyd, late Tutor of King's College, p. 60.

² Such is the Bishop of Chester's Treatise—the Lectures of the Bishops of Calcutta and Ohio—Dr. O. Gregory's Letters—and a valuable Manual by Mr. Joseph John Gurney—'Hints on the Portable Evidence of Christianity.'

³ 2 Corinthians vi. 7.

⁴ 1 Peter iii. 15.

⁵ 1 Hosea vi. 4.

alities—sinks down into the character of a dry, heartless professor, with no genuine response to the vitality of godliness.

Of others again we would speak with special tenderness, while we are constrained to consider them as wanderers from “the old path,” where the church of God has hitherto found “rest,”¹ refreshment, and establishment. But we cannot view without the deepest concern the attempt now made by true disciples of Christ (for such undoubtedly are many of those to whom we allude) to degrade the Son of God to a sinful participation and sympathy with our nature. We feel bound to protest against that ‘great truth,’ now for the first time opened to the church—that believers in this life of sin and imperfection attain at least equal communion with their God, and participation of Divine influence with their heavenly Saviour.’ Thus is the child of fallen Adam complete in himself, not in his Saviour. He needs no exercise of contrition—no application to the blood of the atonement for his daily deficiencies—no High Priest to “bear the iniquities of his holy things.” The plenary baptism of the Spirit precludes the need of an atoning and interceding Saviour for present deficiencies and defilements, and perfects what is called an holiness in the flesh—an inherent righteousness, which blots out the character of sinners, and obscures the glory of the righteousness of the Redeemer, as the exclusive ground of justification before God.²

If we look for the external seal of these anti-scriptural doctrines, it will be found in the exhibition of certain tongues (dissimilar from the primitive manifestations, because unknown, and therefore, unfruitful to the church³) connected with impulses of an extraordinary

¹ Jeremiah vi. 16.

² ‘The great truth,’ which Mr. Irving opens to us, we will state in his own words,—‘that the baptism of the Holy Ghost doth bring to every believer the presence of the Father, and the power of the Holy Ghost, according to that measure at least, in which Christ during the days of his flesh proposed the same.’ The day of Pentecost, p. 39. This communication he immediately expounds to be the ‘Divine nature, (alluding to 2 Peter i. 4), which was intended from the beginning for man; and which can mean nothing less in the Scriptural acceptation than perfect and essential holiness,’ (Eph. iv. 24. 1 John i. 5.) Indeed Mr. I.’s subsequent explanation includes spiritual grace as well as miraculous powers, p. 55. The reader may see the confirmation of this bold statement, and of the inferences legitimately deduced from it, in a remarkable ‘Narrative of Facts, by Robert Baxter.’ (Pp. 102—116, 124—126.)—a truly Christian acknowledgment of Divine mercy in recovery from delusion, and an exposition of the subtle causes connected with its origin.

³ That the Primitive Tongues were known, and therefore fruitful, is proved from the history of the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 3—11.), from the corresponding manifestation to Cornelius and his company (Acts xi. 18), and from St. Paul’s statement of his own gift, evidently vouchsafed to facilitate his missionary work. (1 Cor. xiv. 15.) It will hardly be pretended that two different dispensations of tongues were vouchsafed. See the Apostle’s decision upon the unfruitfulness of unknown tongues. (1 Cor. xiv. 9—19.) If the interpolation ‘unknown,’ were removed from our version, the simple translation would be ‘languages.’ We may remark one striking discrepancy between the apostolical and the modern manifestations of gifts. In the former case they were largely bestowed upon ministers, as the credentials of their commission. In the present time they are confined to members of the congregation, who thus *virtually* take the precedence of their ministers; inasmuch as an immediate revelation, being the present voice of God in and to the church, obviously commands higher authority than the more ordinary channels of Divine communication. Thus the inward revelation may take the place of the written word; females often occupy the dignity and responsibility of the sacred office; and by an inversion of the scriptural rule and order (Mal. ii. 7.) ministers sit at the feet of their

character, both of which have been confessed by some of the most accredited subjects to have been the offspring of delusion. Does not all this almost seem to give a prophetic character to the Apostolic caution—"I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ?"¹ That these doctrines come not from Christ is manifest from their obvious tendency to exalt self, and to stain the unspotted holiness of our Divine Saviour. That they are not the fruit of the unction of the Spirit, is equally clear from their results, in obscuring the light and authority of Scripture by some super-induced credentials, and thus confounding "the spirit of truth" in the world, and "the spirit of error"² in the new revelation. That as novelties they have no stability, we are encouraged to believe, from the gracious deliverance that has been manifested to some, who were fast bound under their seductive influence; while those who are yet beguiled claim (though perhaps they may not thank us for putting forth the claim) our sympathy, forbearance, and prayer.

What are wanted on all sides as the basis of an established profession, are, first, *brokenness and contrition of heart*. Here, as we before observed, Miss Graham's deficiency exposed her to "the snare of the devil." Not being deeply impressed with the sense of her own vileness, she could not lie low enough before her God to receive his pure and heavenly light in her soul. He was therefore pleased to humble her thoroughly, till he had brought her to his feet; that happiest, lowest, yet most exalted place for a redeemed sinner. What Job learnt in his prostrate frame of humiliation, made all the former attainments of this "perfect man" of God appear as nothing in his eyes.³ And indeed there is much to be acquired in a self-abasing walk with God, and in a well-digested study of our hearts, before there can be any capacity for receiving a scriptural apprehension of the doctrines, that are the matter of present controversy in the church. The decided views on these subjects, that are sometimes received at an early, and perhaps uncertain, stage of the Christian profession, have been probably obtained under the influence of excitement, rather than from Divine teaching—from an implicit

people; their "lips"—not the "priest's"—keep knowledge, and the law is sought at" their "mouth." Thus God becomes "the author" of "confusion"—not of "peace, as he is in all churches of the saints." (1 Cor. xiv. 33.) The writer would desire to cherish a tender, compassionate, and prayerful interest for those whom he is constrained to consider deluded brethren. He would protest against the unholy trifling and bitterness with which they have been too often regarded. He readily acknowledges the practical influence of some of the main principles of the Gospel fixed in their minds at the commencement of their course; and still operating as a preservative from the dominant influence of their serious error. Yet he feels himself constrained, though with painful personal reluctance, to bear his testimony against unscriptural doctrines attested by hitherto unknown manifestations, which, *if they be of supernatural origin*, may possibly, notwithstanding the apparent holiness which is often connected with them, bear the mark rather of the delusion than of the spiritual glory of the latter days. Mark xiii. 22, 23. Indeed this stamp of holiness may be the illustration of "the depths of Satan"²—of those subtle devices, by which the "angel of light" is permitted to use the instrumentality of the Lord's people to convey his own deadly poison into the very bosom of the church.

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 3.

² 1 John iv. 16.

³ Job. xl. 4; xlii. 5, 6, with i. 8.

submission to some professed leader in the church, rather than from a simple exercised study of the sacred volume. In the spirit of brokenness of heart, this deluding power of excitement is subjugated to a chastened temper of tenderness and self-distrust. One want absorbs every faculty and desire of the soul. There is no temptation to linger by the way in busy idleness amid the attractions of novelty. There is a careful guard against all entanglements of disputation that might, by diverting the mind from the main object of pursuit, palsy the spiritual affections, and pervert even the word of God to an occasion of erasing instead of fixing permanent impressions upon the heart. In this spirit of "simplicity and godly sincerity," the mind will gradually be enabled to receive scriptural statements, that before it had been unable to comprehend; and will grasp, with an intelligent habit of faith, the fulness of Divine truth in all its happy and practical influence.

Connected with this temper, *spiritual apprehensions of Christ are of the utmost moment.* This was the main principle of Miss Graham's steadiness of profession. She was accustomed, as we have before noticed, to "*consider Christ.*"¹ Hers were not transient glances at the glorious object of faith. Her religion was characterized by a contemplative habit of connecting every part of the Christian system with Christ. And in this great subject, the most intellectual mind will find full employ. Unfathomable depths, after a long life of research, will yet remain to be explored. Here we may advance with deeper intensity of interest at every successive step, until the whole soul is "filled with all the fulness of God!"² A mind sustained and invigorated by these sublime contemplations, will lose its speculative taste; will try "doubtful disputations" by their reference to this grand subject; and, while enlarging to the utmost its compass of sacred truth, will be drawn off from uncertain doctrines to those that are evidently scriptural in their character, clear in their light, fruitful in privilege, holy in influence. "Not" being altogether "ignorant of Satan's devices, the Christian will readily trace to its proper source all diverging from this concentrating point, and will steadily guard against this baneful "corruption from the simplicity that is in Christ." And thus living by faith, he will live upon the vitality of the Gospel. The unfolding of Christ makes holiness at once practicable and precious. His principles, as they expand in knowledge, will become more practical in results; while these results will reciprocally exercise his principles in a more lively and delightful glow of Divine light."³

For the cultivation of this spiritual contemplation, *habits of retirement seem to be of importance.* Leaving the time, measure, and rules to every man's judgment and conscience, and being fully aware that a difference of character generates in this particular a diversity in the operation of Divine grace—we cannot forbear inculcating the general subject, as applicable to the several departments

¹ See pp. 178, 179.

² Ephes. iii. 18, 19.

³ 1 See 2 Peter i. 5—8.

of the church. Doubtless Miss Graham's retired habits gave much advantage to the exercise of her mind in heavenly contemplation. Probably much of the defective standard of attainment and privilege in the present day may be traced to the neglect of the habits now adverted to. Christians actively engaged in the service of God, may be ensnared by the very activity of their engagements. Those of a more quiet and collected temperament will connect their "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord"—their most solid, stable, invigorating comfort—with the cultivation of this habit. Those who are enabled still to maintain the freshness of their early impressions, feel their need of this advantage, and mourn over the deprivation of it as a loss, for which no Christian society—however refined, elevated, or holy—can compensate. All who realize the difficulties of their daily path, and the weariness that belongs to incessant watchfulness and conflict, must feel, that, as the body cannot be sustained without sleep, so neither can the soul thrive without *the active rest*, so to speak, of retirement with God. A recollected habit of mind—shutting out the world, and calling home our thoughts to Christ and eternity—is indispensable to give life and spirituality to our religion, to bring the one object of faith into fixed contemplation, and the more enlivening prospects of eternity into more constant influence.¹

Need we further suggest *the incalculable importance of a deep and spiritual study of the word of God*, in connection with an established profession of the Gospel? Miss Graham's exclusive study of the word after the period of her recovery from infidelity (*'the Lord helping her to pray over every word she read'*²) must have been productive of a rich harvest to her soul. And indeed the general supremacy and entireness of this sacred study throughout life³ was a main source of her mature apprehension of the doctrines of Christ. May not a partial study of Scripture explain the difficulty, why sincere Christians—praying for the promised "guidance of the Holy Spirit into *all truth*"⁴—should yet be left under the influence of error? Do they heartily desire to be guided into the *all truth*—into practical as well as doctrinal—into humbling as well as the more exciting—truths? Is every part of the holy book, after the example of this devoted saint, honored as the word of God—carefully explored, and earnestly prayed over? The promise supposes *a diligent search of the whole field of Divine truth*, and the

¹ 'The fault of many Christians in our day,' remarks a truly Christian observer, 'is, that they live too much in public. We do not mean that they are dissipated, or particularly worldly in their habits and associations (though this is true, alas! of some), but that the work of the heart is postponed to the work of the head and the hands. Committees, schools, charitable meetings, occupy the time, and fill the thoughts; while solitude, and especially a devotional solitude, is a thing almost wholly unknown. Half the errors of the present day may probably be traced to this source; the facility with which Christians are carried away by every kind of doctrine; the low standard of personal holiness; the small amount of self-denying charity—for these, and such as these, brethren, there is no remedy but walking, like Enoch, very closely with God.'—*Blunt's History of Elisha.*

² See p. 97.

³ See pp. 180—182.

⁴ John xvi. 13.

neglect of any part of this field shuts us out from the sphere of the promise. Perhaps also a superficial study of "the word of Christ"—even when the whole surface is surveyed—is one of the most prominent causes of slight profession in the present day. It too often lodges only—not "dwells" with us; or it dwells with us—not *in us*; or the "riches" of the treasure-house are too little regarded; or the "wisdom that is from above" is but little exercised in the application of its contents to our several emergencies.¹ In some cases we mark a disproportionate attention to the externals of Scripture, which betrays a criminal indifference to its spiritual excellences. The holy simplicity of study is deteriorated. The mind is contented to feed upon husks, while the heavenly pleasures connected with the internal study of the sacred volume are untouched and unknown. With others again the subjects revolve before the mind, but without research. The difference is inconceivable between the act of reading, and the habit of meditation and search in the sacred volume. If the mind does not ponder often upon Scripture, no definite views will be obtained, no profitable instruction drawn out from it. Whereas a spiritually reflecting mind will extract rich meaning from its apparently difficult and barren portions. Being made the subject of thought, and formed into materials for prayer, Scripture knowledge becomes of a more heavenly character; and meditation upon a single passage becomes more fruitful than the general reading of large portions of the sacred book. Perhaps there is no precept more intimately connected with establishment in the Gospel, than that which has been indirectly adverted to—"*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.*" Let there be no part of us, where the word does not dwell. Let there be no part of the word, that does not dwell in us. Here is a new world of heavenly light, where the intellect is called forth into its full exercise. Here the soul is refreshed, and the heart is moulded under the influence of Divine wisdom; and hence stability of our profession "in the simplicity of Christ."

We would venture to add a few words upon *the high responsibility of cultivating "the spirit of a sound mind."* The high estimate which the Apostle formed of this faculty may be seen in his placing it among the special gifts for the work of the ministry,² and in his prayers for his own son in the faith,³ and for his beloved flock, that they might maintain it in constant exercise. His own example proves, that, instead of a sound judgment cooling the fervor of zeal (as it is sometimes supposed to do), it increases its effect by directing its movements.⁴ Indeed a weakness in this point brings with it many hindrances to a settled consistency of profession. A luxuriant imagination often obscures the well-regulated and implicit exercise of faith. The truth is often clothed with adventitious attractions. It is not received simply as of God. There is a want of clear perception and determined grasp of the points presented to

¹ Col. iii. 16.² 2 Tim. i. 6, 7.³ Ib. ii. 7.⁴ Phil. i. 9.

view. Again, an excited temperament without a staid judgment, opens many avenues of delusion. This is a matter of frequent notice in the cases of a defective religious education, or of late conversion; or in a rapid transition from the cares of business or the warfare of the camp, to the heated atmospheres which are now to be found in the church. The dazzling brightness of truth breaking in upon unfurnished minds, and often upon palpable darkness, overpowers the faculty of discrimination. The overturn of their former opinions has destroyed confidence in their own conclusions; and together with their old prejudices, their intellectual stability is swept away. In another direction, also, lively affections and weak judgment give a wrong bias to the character. The Christian under an enlivening sense of the Saviour's love is ready to embrace any new view or doctrine, which he conceives calculated to honor and exalt him. Now a controlling power is as necessary for the healthful regularity of the mind, as an invigorating principle. Opinionative decision is too often mistaken for spiritual principle. We want the influence of "the wisdom from above," not only to open to our minds expanded and attractive views of truth, but to enable us to affix to every part its just proportion—that no favorite doctrines be suffered to absorb our interest, or be raised to an undue importance—that essential points may have their preponderance over those of a more doubtful character—that every step of our progress may present to us a more complete view of the harmony of the system. The multitude of excursions in the theological field, without and beyond the rule of revelation, are an evidence of that wandering of the mind from reality, and that triumph of imagination over truth, which denotes a mind not in the full possession of its own powers. But let us in another track be careful that the sublime contemplation of the Gospel does not pamper a prurient curiosity; but rather that it gives a more settled character to our faith, and a wise and active direction to our practice. Let us watch also, under the exercise of this sound mind, that the fear of uncertain doctrines does not quench the ardour of Scriptural investigation—that we continue our research "unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding,"¹—that we go on as long as there is one point of the sacred book unexplored—"forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before."²

We cannot but remark how frequently a defect of soundness of mind is connected with unsteadiness of profession. And indeed in all cases, important talents of influence are wasted, and valuable spheres of usefulness are contracted, by this evil. What servant of God, therefore, conscious alike of his responsibility and weakness, will not present his frequent and earnest petition to the throne of grace—"Teach me good judgment and knowledge?"³ These inestimable blessings are not the exclusive accomplishments of highly-gifted intellects. The believer—weak in natural intelligence, but

¹ Col. ii. 2.

² Phil. iii. 13.

³ Psalm cxix. 66.

simple in dependence upon his God—will be not only guided, but established in the truth, even in the midst of abounding errors. He will be “taught not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits, whether they be of God.”¹ He will be led to “try the things that differ”² in the church—not by the holiness of their several professors, (which—even if it were more perfectly apprehended—is not the decisive Test of Truth,) but by “the law and the testimony;” being assured “that if they speak not according to this word”—“though they be “angels of light”—“there is no light in them.”³

III. *The memoir before us may also point out the ground and blessedness of Scriptural enjoyment.* Miss Graham’s full reception of the high principles of the Gospel made Christian devotedness a privilege, and Christian resignation the path of peace. Her clear views of sovereign grace; her tender spirit of assured confidence; and the bright beaming rays of her hope of glory, were sources of incessant energy and heavenly cheerfulness. The spiritual atmosphere in which she lived, communicated life to her fainting spirit. Her heart received a new bent, and found a new home in the bosom of her God. The staid sobriety of her character,—the happiness she found in entire consecration of herself to God—her quiet composure of mind in the chamber of suffering—the overcoming strength and vigor, sustaining her soul in joyfulness—abundantly proved, that she had not embraced an empty cloud—that she had not caught a shadow under the delusion of enjoying God—but that God was indeed the rest and portion of her soul.

But what, on the other hand, is the portion—what the prospect—of the man (whether destitute of the profession of the Gospel, or holding it in delusion,) who lives “without God in the world?”⁴ He must raise his “altar”—if he thinks of worship at all for the quieting of conscience—“To the unknown God.”⁵ He makes to himself a god after his own fancy, his own heart; and it proves to be an infinite nothing. He cannot know his Creator;⁶ he therefore cannot enjoy him. For want of this knowledge and enjoyment, he dooms himself to everlasting misery. He will not rest in God. He cannot rest in anything short of God. If ever there was a remedy designed for man, bearing the character of divine love, it is the Gospel of Jesus, opening an uncreated source as alone sufficient to quench the thirst of immortal souls—“Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live.”⁷

¹ 1 John iv. 1.

² Phil. i. 10. Marg.

³ 2 Cor. xi. 14. Isaiah viii. 20.

⁴ Ephesians ii. 12.

⁵ Acts xvii. 23.

⁶ See Miss Graham’s striking and original thoughts on this subject in the latter part of the Test of Truth.

⁷ Isaiah lv. 1—3.

Let us hear the breathings of the holy and seraphic Baxter, after this soul-satisfying portion. 'In thee I expect my true felicity and content. To know thee, and love thee, and delight in thee, must be my blessedness, or I must have none. The little tastes of this sweetness, which my thirsty soul hath had, do tell me that there is no other real joy. I feel that thou hast made my mind to know thee, my heart to love thee, my tongue to praise thee, and all that I am and have to serve thee. And even in the panting languishing desires and motions of my soul, I find that thou, and only thou art its resting-place; and though love do now but *search*, and *pray*, and *cry*, and *weep*, and is reaching upward, but cannot reach, the glorious light, the blessed knowledge, the perfect love, for which it longeth; yet, by its eye, its aim, its motions, its moans, its groans, I know its meaning, where it would be, and I know its end. My displaced soul will never be well, till it come near to thee, till it know thee better, till it love thee more. Wert thou to be found in the most solitary desert, it would seek thee; or in the uttermost parts of the earth, it would make after thee. Thy presence makes a crowd a church; thy converse maketh a closet, or solitary wood or field, to be akin to the angelical choir. The creature were dead, if thou wert not its life; and ugly, if thou wert not its beauty; and insignificant, if thou wert not its sense. The soul its deformed, which is without thine image; and lifeless which liveth not in love to thee, if love be not its pulse, and prayer and praise is constant breath. The mind is unlearned, which readeth not thy name on all the world. He dreameth, who doth not live to thee. Oh! let me have no other portion! no reason, no love, no life, but what is devoted to thee, employed on thee, and for thee here, and shall be perfected in thee, the only perfect, final object for evermore. Upon the holy altar erected by thy Son, and by his hands and his meditation, I humbly devote and offer to thee *this heart*—Oh! that I could say with greater feeling—*this flaming, loving, longing heart!* But the sacred fire which must kindle on my sacrifice, must come from thee. It will not else ascend unto thee. Let it consume this dross, so the nobler part may know its home. All that I can say to commend it to thine acceptance, is, that I hope it is washed in precious blood, and that there is something in it that is thine own. It still looketh toward thee, and groaneth to thee, and floweth after thee, and will be content with gold, and mirth, and honor, and such inferior fooleries no more. It lieth at thy door, and will be entertained, or perish. Though, alas! it loves thee not as it would, I boldly say, it longs to love thee. It loves to love thee. It seeks, it craves no greater blessedness than perfect, endless, mutual love. It is vowed to thee, even to thee alone, and will never take up with shadows more; but it is resolved to lie down in sorrow and despair, if thou wilt not be its rest and joy. It hateth itself for loving thee no more, accounting no want, deformity, shame, or pain, so great and grievous a calamity.¹

¹ Reasons of the Christian religion, chap. xii.

Christians! You, like this holy man of God, have made trial of this portion; and you alone are competent to speak of it. You can bear testimony that the knowledge and enjoyment of God, coming to us through Christ—our Head, our All—is unspeakable bliss. It fills the most enlarged appetite of the soul. It fixes our hovering thoughts and restless anticipations. It perfects all our desires in holy delight and joy. It is the triumph of everlasting love over all the wretchedness, wants, and guilt of man. It gives supreme enjoyment in life—hope in death—a portion for eternity.

“WHOM HAVE I IN HEAVEN BUT THEE? AND THERE IS NONE UPON EARTH THAT I DESIRE BESIDE THEE. MY FLESH AND MY HEART FAILETH; BUT GOD IS THE STRENGTH OF MY HEART, AND MY PORTION FOREVER.”¹

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 25, 26.

THE END.

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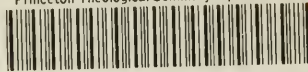
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